

# BOB COOK AND THE WINGED MESSENGERS



PAUL G. TOMLINSON

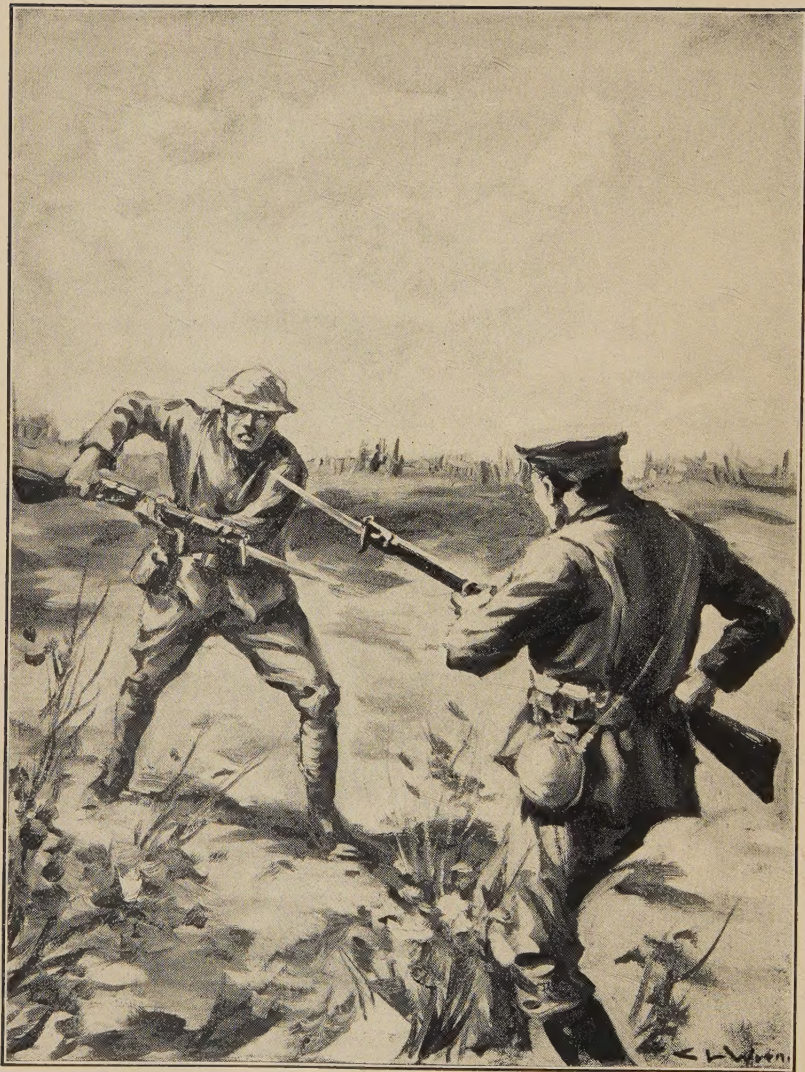












“And then the duel began.”

*(Bob Cook and the Winged Messenger)*

*(Page 23)*

# **BOB COOK**

## **AND THE**

# **WINGED MESSENGER**

**BY**

**PAUL G. TOMLINSON**

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Spy," etc., etc.**

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## PREFACE

In this story, the fourth of the FLAG AND COUNTRY SERIES, Bob Cook's adventures, and those of his brother Harold, are continued. The scenes are laid in France with the American army which went "over there" more than two million strong to fight that justice and civilization might prevail against injustice and barbarism. What these two boys did in this tale other boys have done in real life. The exploits of our "Sammies" have formed the basis for the story of the adventures of Bob and Harold.

America did not win the war alone. But she did her part, and those of us who had no active share in the winning of the struggle will always be envious of the men and boys who did the actual fighting. Probably we shall always be interested in reading about the brave deeds they performed, however, and it is because of this belief that the adventures of "Bob Cook and the Winged Messenger" have been set forth in this book.

PAUL G. TOMLINSON.

Princeton, N. J.



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# BOB COOK AND THE WINGED MESSENGER

## CHAPTER I

JOE AND ARTHUR

**A** LITTLE group of soldiers was seated in a first line trench in France. It was mid-afternoon of a warm fall day and in spite of the fact that the enemy trenches were only distant a half mile, there was practically no fighting activity. The sector was a quiet one, as may be imagined. One could scarcely have realized that a war was in progress as he looked out over the rolling countryside. Only the infrequent boom caused by the explosion of a distant shell bore evidence that the great world struggle was still in progress, even if it had lapsed momentarily in this particular spot.

A sentinel kept watch of the enemy lines through a trench periscope. The other occupants of the position sat on the firing step, or leaned against the side of the trench and talked. Their

talk was interesting, and on the same subject they had discussed almost unceasingly for several weeks past. This subject was the American offensive which every man knew was to be launched in this sector; the one thing they did not know was the time when it was to take place, and opinions almost without end were expressed on this point.

There was another subject they talked of too. That is, they talked of it when speculation concerning the offensive seemed momentarily exhausted. Nor was this second subject of much less interest than the first. Since the regiment had moved into that sector more than one man had noticed pigeons flying over the lines, flying in the direction of the German trenches. One of the birds had been shot down, and a note in cipher taken from its leg. The cipher was in the German language. Moreover, it was noticed that after one of the pigeons had gone over, a particularly accurate bombardment of the American positions by the enemy artillery always followed. Some German agent was at work, that was evident.

“And if we ever find out who it is, heaven help him,” said Joe Kenyon, fiercely. “His life won’t be worth two cents.”

“Two cents is a high price,” replied Arthur Nelson.

“The skunk,” cried a third member of the group.

Joe Kenyon was a big blond haired giant of a private who had enlisted the day war was declared, and who had seen almost as much service at the front as any men in the American Expeditionary Forces. His muscles were of steel, and his nerve of iron. It was said of him that the only person he really stood in awe of was General Pershing, and that the only people he respected were his officers. Moreover, it was whispered throughout the regiment that already he had accounted for four Germans. Be that as it may he wore the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry in action at Chateau-Thierry. His face was burned red from exposure to wind and sun, while the back of his neck had the appearance of old leather, it was so seamed and brown.

Arthur Nelson was almost as small as Joe Kenyon was large. He claimed just enough inches to make him eligible for the infantry, but every inch of him was composed of the material of a man. His hair was dark, and his eyes were black, always wide open and seemed to be on fire most of the time. He thought Joe Kenyon about

the greatest American living, next to President Wilson, and the two privates were almost inseparable. They were together at every opportunity. Some wit had nicknamed them "Mutt and Jeff," and indeed as they walked about together, the difference in their height did give them something of the appearance of those two characters. Only Joe Kenyon and Arthur Nelson were not comic characters. They were engaged in the grim business of killing Germans, and they had little time for fooling.

But they did know how to play, and they proved it every time they got leave. In fact Arthur Nelson on one occasion found that he had overdone it. They were billeted in a small French town, and Arthur occupied a second floor room over what had once been a candy shop; awaking one day after a nap and casting about for amusement, he had found it by dropping a paper bag filled with water on the head of the guard patrolling the street below. A fine of one month's pay resulted, but Arthur was young, his expenses were small and he considered the enjoyment his prank had given him to be worth while. He was serious now, however.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "if we ever get our hands



on the man who has been releasing those pigeons, he won't live long to regret it."

"Personally I don't believe any one in our company is responsible," said Joe Kenyon. "I know them all."

Usually Arthur agreed with everything his big friend said, but this time he was not so sure.

"Do you know every man in the company?" he asked.

"I think I do."

"Yes," cried Arthur, "but you must remember that new men are being assigned to us all the time to make up for casualties. It's impossible to keep track of them all."

"Well, anyway," said Joe, "it's hard for me to imagine any man in the uniform of the United States Army doing such a thing. How do they get the birds over here anyway?"

"Maybe no one in uniform did it," said Arthur.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Joe in surprise.

"Oh, I have a theory," said Arthur mysteriously, "just an idea I'm working on you know."

"But—" began Joe, when he was interrupted by the arrival of Lieutenant Harold Cook, who appeared around the corner of the nearest traverse.

"How's everything, boys?" he inquired cheerily.

"All right, sir, but pretty slow," replied Joe, speaking for the others.

"It may be livelier soon," said Lieutenant Cook, and passed on.

"There goes a star if there ever was one," exclaimed Arthur heartily, when the young officer had moved out of earshot.

"Right," responded a unanimous chorus of voices from the little group.

"A prince," said Joe Kenyon. "A man who isn't afraid to do any thing he'd ask you to do."

"If his brother was here," said Arthur, "maybe he'd help us find the man who's sending out the pigeons."

"How could his brother find him?" demanded Joe, puzzled.

"Why he has quite a reputation as a detective," said Arthur. "He's a lieutenant in the aviation now, and only a youngster too. Back home when we first went into the war he and some other boy spotted a gang of German spies in their home town. Then these two enlisted as flyers, and when they got to France did a lot to help catch a man who was fooling with the airplanes, filing wires and that sort of stuff. They've both been at

the front for a long time now, and I hear they're fine."

"They must be a couple of live ones," exclaimed one of the men in the group. "I'll bet the young one has nothing on his brother though."

"You're right there," said Arthur. "They don't come any better than him."

"Did you hear what he said about things getting more lively soon?" asked Joe. "That's what I like to hear."

"Well, I heard," said one of the group, a stocky young man named Sam Howe, who in spite of his lack of years had numerous gray hairs, and was on that account called Uncle Sam, "that the British and French and Belgians are giving 'em blazes up to the north of us. It'll be our turn next."

"On to Berlin," exclaimed Arthur gleefully. "Over the Rhine."

"Well, I for one wish they'd start us on our way," cried Joe. "I'm getting tired of just sitting around talking about it."

"Why don't you start an offensive of your own then?" laughed Sam Howe. "You needn't wait on our account, and all I ask is that if you get to Berlin before we do, please tell the Kaiser not to worry, that we'll be along in just a little while."

"I think I will start something," said Joe, inspecting the mechanism of his rifle, and running his thumb along the edge of his bayonet.

The other members of the group looked at him curiously, wondering what their big comrade was planning to do. That he proposed doing something was very evident from the expression on his face.

"I'm with you, you know, Joe," exclaimed Arthur anxiously, fearful lest his friend might be planning some expedition in which he was not to be included.

"How do you know what I'm going to do?" demanded Joe, his eyes resting affectionately upon his small comrade.

"I don't care what you're going to do," said Arthur, stoutly. "I'm with you whatever it is."

"You better stay home this time," said Joe.

"Where are you going?"

"Why it's so slow around here I thought I'd start something."

"What are you going to do?" Arthur insisted.

"Better let him alone, Art," advised Sam Howe. "Evidently he wants to do this trick alone. Going to Berlin, Joe?"

"No," drawled Joe. "Not so far as that. I just thought I'd kind of go out there in front



and see if I couldn't find a German for myself."

This intelligence given in such a careless, unconcerned manner caused a sensation in the trench. The proposed offensive, and the pigeons flying overhead were all forgotten. No one knew exactly what Joe meant by his words, but they knew something interesting was in store.

"You're crazy, man," exclaimed Sam Howe. "Those trenches over there may look dead and deserted, but if any man is foolish enough to show himself out in front of them, and in broad daylight, he'll soon find out that looks are deceiving."

"I'm going with you, Joe," cried Arthur, the only one of the group that interposed no objection to Joe's plan. "Take me with you, Joe."

Kenyon looked at him and smiled, but shook his head. "I better go alone this time," he said. "One is better than two on this trip."

"Don't be a fool, Joe," said Sam Howe. "What's the use of going and gettin' yourself all killed up"—this was one of Sam's favorite expressions—"just before the big push starts? Save yourself for that."

"I'm bored this afternoon," said Joe. "I gotta start something."

He was not to be shaken in his purpose, nor

would he listen to Arthur's entreaties that he be allowed to go along. In silence he looked over his equipment, to make sure that everything was in readiness, and continued to turn a deaf ear to the pleadings and advice of his comrades trying in vain to dissuade him from what they considered a foolhardy undertaking. Perhaps it was foolhardy, but Joe was firm in his determination, and a few moments later he crawled carefully out of the trench and started,—as he expressed it—to get a German for himself.

## CHAPTER II

### BETWEEN THE LINES

“**T**HE man is plumb crazy,” exclaimed Sam Howe.

“I wish I was with him just the same,” said Arthur wistfully.

His comrades in the trench watched Joe’s progress. There were few places between the lines which afforded any cover, but towards the best of these—a clump of small trees and bushes, which in some way had escaped destruction—Joe made his way. He crawled along on all fours, occasionally dropping into a shell crater for protection until he could survey the ground in front of him and assure himself that all was clear.

“Well, they haven’t seen him yet apparently,” observed Sam Howe, when Joe had covered about half the distance to the trees, approximately fifty yards. “If they ever spot him ducking into that bunch of bushes, though, the Heinies will blow it a mile high. He can’t get away with it.”

“The bushes may be full of Germans, too,” said another member of the group. “They’ll see him sure.”

Arthur Nelson said nothing. His eyes were anxious, however, and with an uneasy look on his face he watched his friend steal forward. The sun was sinking low in the western sky, and the shadows were growing long. It was the time of day when men’s spirits were low, for they knew the night with the alarms and dangers incident to renewed activity would soon be upon them. Arthur could not help but feel worried.

Meanwhile Joe still advanced. His rifle clutched firmly in his left hand, he leaped from crater to crater with the agility of a mountain goat. In spite of his size he was as light on his feet as a feather, and he had that perfect control over all his movements which denotes the trained athlete.

“I guess there’s nobody in those bushes,” said Sam Howe at length. “Joe always was lucky.”

“The fellow with nerve always is,” said Arthur shortly.

“Joe’s got that all right, hasn’t he?” observed Lieutenant Harold Cook, who had rejoined the group unobserved, and with the others was watching Joe as he made his way across No Man’s Land.

"There's none braver in the world, sir," said Arthur warmly.

"Not many anyway, I guess," said the young lieutenant. "Still I'm sorry he started out this way. It seems like a useless risk."

"Just what I said, sir," exclaimed Sam Howe.

"They haven't got him yet, have they?" snapped Arthur peevishly. He was always jealous of any criticism of what Joe did.

"No, *not yet*," agreed Sam.

Silence ensued as every eye was fixed on the daring man, who braved the German trenches in the light of day, and braved them alone.

"He'll get all killed up sure," muttered Sam, but no one paid any attention to this remark. All attention was centered on the figure out in front of the trenches. Joe had almost reached the clump of bushes now. He sprang forward, and disappeared from sight in a shell crater.

"Notice how he keeps the bushes between him and the Heinies," exclaimed Arthur admiringly.

"He knows his business."

"I hope there's no Germans in the bushes," said Sam.

"Say, you're a cheerful guy, aren't you?" demanded Arthur sarcastically.

"There he goes," cried Lieutenant Cook sud-

denly, and as he spoke Joe was seen to spring forward swiftly, and a moment later was lost to sight in the clump of bushes.

Every one was silent, and anxious. As far as could be known Joe had reached the patch of trees without being seen, but Sam's fears that Germans might already be established there were shared by all the watchers. Nothing happened, however, and the spectators began to wonder what was taking place, for it seemed as if a long time had elapsed since Joe had reached his shelter.

"He couldn't have left there," ventured Lieutenant Cook. "We'd have seen him."

"Perhaps he's going to stay there till it's dark, and then start back," suggested Arthur. "He couldn't go much farther anyway."

"Some Heinie probably stuck a bayonet in him," said Sam. "I knew all the time that—"

"Shut your head," cried Arthur fiercely. "You're the worst gloom I ever saw." He glared at Sam, and stood with clenched fists, as if debating whether he should lunge at him or not.

"All right," muttered Sam. "Maybe you know better than I do."

Eyes were strained for the sight of any movement among the trees. A giant shell rumbled past overhead, and a dull boom a moment later



indicated that it had exploded behind the German lines. It awakened no interest in the minds of the little group in the trench, however. They were intent on the patch of cover in front of them. Nothing else mattered.

Suddenly an exclamation of surprise issued simultaneously from a dozen throats. Joe Kenyon had appeared from out the clump of bushes as if shot from a gun. He had come out backwards. Close after him came a German, a man as large as Joe himself. Bayoneted rifle in hand he sprang at the daring Yankee, who squared off to parry the thrust. And then the duel began.

The Americans would have liked to fire at Joe's opponent, but did not dare for fear of hitting their comrade. Doubtless the Germans opposite held their fire lest they should hit their man. At any rate not a shot was heard, and no one could tell how many hundred pairs of eyes from both the American and German trenches were focussed on the strange combat going on out there in No Man's Land.

The German lunged fiercely at Joe. He parried, and tried to counter with the butt of his gun, but his opponent was too quick for him. Again the German lunged forward, and again Joe parried. Thrust succeeded thrust, parry followed

parry, as the two men maneuvered for an opening. They were both experts and equally matched.

"Gosh," muttered Arthur, breathless with excitement, as Joe seemed momentarily to slip, and the big German sprang forward to press his advantage home.

"Pretty close," exclaimed Lieutenant Cook, as Joe regained his footing and stood on equal terms with his opponent once more.

For minutes that seemed like hours the struggle continued. At times it looked as if Joe had the upper hand and was going to put an end to his enemy, and then in the twinkling of an eye the situation would change and no one could see any hope for Joe. Back and forth they swayed, around and around they danced, while the sun sinking red in the sky shone on them with its crimson glare.

Never was a stranger contest held. The men in the opposing trenches forgot that they were there to kill one another. The one thing that interested them was the struggle going on between the lines, while the two men engaged in it seemed oblivious to everything but each other.

"That German's a wonder," said Sam Howe. "Joe's the best man in the regiment with the bayonet."

“Joe’ll get him,” said Arthur confidently.

As he spoke the German thrust viciously at Joe, who stepped back and only partially warded off the blow. He seemed to be tired, and beginning to weaken. He gave ground steadily before his opponent, who pressed on relentlessly, evidently resolved to end the fight at once. Exclamations of dismay arose from the American trench, for it certainly looked as if their favorite were going to lose, and to lose in such a contest meant death.

“Shall I try a shot, sir?” exclaimed Arthur excitedly. “I think I can pick off that Heinie.”

“No, wait,” ordered Harold. “If you did get the German you’d only draw the fire from their lines, and Joe wouldn’t stand a chance.”

Back, back, back Joe was forced, while the German sensing victory pressed his attack the harder.

Joe’s friends and comrades fancied they could see the look of fiendish exultation on his face.

“Get him, Joe. Stick to him,” pleaded Arthur.

But Joe seemed done for. Apparently the end was almost at hand for he showed increasing difficulty in protecting himself. Then an unexpected thing happened. The German in his eagerness lunged too fiercely on one occasion. His thrust missed and the impulse of his effort threw him off

his balance. Only for a moment, but a moment was long enough. Quick as lightning Joe wheeled and plunged his bayonet to the hilt, into his opponent's side, just under the left arm. Like a man of straw the German fell heavily to the ground.

Instantly a roar went up from the American lines. Hundreds of voices joined in the cheer, for all along the lines in both directions interested and excited soldiers had been watching the duel. It was more thrilling than any football or boxing contest ever staged, for here the stake was life or death.

"He did it. He did it. I knew he would," shouted Arthur deliriously. "It takes a better man than a Heinie to get Joe."

"He's there all right," agreed Sam heartily. "I take my hat off to him."

"But what's he doing?" demanded Lieutenant Harold Cook, for Joe, instead of making for his own trenches or seeking cover, was coolly bending over his fallen foe, and starting to remove his helmet. Meanwhile the Germans, the minute the duel had ended, and they saw their man beaten, had opened fire on the victor with rifles and machine guns. Standing exposed in No Man's Land Joe was the target for hundreds of bullets.

"Come in, Joe!" shouted Arthur, his jubilation

changed to anxiety. "Come away from there. This is no time to be hunting souvenirs."

Apparently unconcerned about his danger, however, Joe went calmly on with what he was doing.

## CHAPTER III

### UNDER FIRE

**T**HE rattle and crack of the guns became almost continuous. The firing spread to the American trenches where the machine gunners got to work with a barrage fire on their enemies opposite. Soon the artillery joined in and the noise became deafening. Shells from the American field pieces began to explode on the German positions, and in return the Yankee intrenchments were subjected to a heavy fire.

“Joe! Joe!” shouted Arthur distractedly. “Come here, you dunce!” And Joe came. At least he started. He had removed the dead German’s helmet, possessed himself of his trench knife and rifle, and apparently was just now ready to start for a place of safety. He glanced about him as if aware for the first time of the danger he was in. spurts of dirt all about him showed where the bullets were striking, and that he had not been hit seemed a miracle.

Joe ran. At top speed he started for his own lines, while his comrades looking on held their breath.



"He'll never make it," cried Sam, and as he spoke Joe suddenly disappeared from view. He plunged heavily forward into a great shell hole which yawned at his feet and to all intents and purposes vanished off the face of the earth.

"They got him," cried Sam.

"Got him nothing," retorted Arthur. "How do you know they did?"

"Didn't you see him fall?"

"He jumped."

"All right," said Sam. "He jumped." He said it in a sarcastic tone, however, and evidently had not changed his opinion.

"You big stiff," cried Arthur fiercely, and with all the force of his clenched fist he struck Sam full on the point of the jaw. Without a sound Sam sank to the bottom of the trench, and lay there unconscious.

"A clean knockout," exclaimed one of the group. "Why did you hit him, Art?"

"He makes me mad," cried Arthur hotly, while he nursed his bruised knuckles. "Always glooming and grouching. What does he want to go and say my buddy is killed for? They can't get Joe. Didn't I tell him it would take somebody better than a Heinie to do that?"

Arthur was almost hysterical with rage, anxiety,

and excitement. "I didn't mean to hit him so hard, Lieutenant," he said to Harold. "He made me so mad I didn't realize what I was doing."

"I believe you," said Harold shortly. "At the same time we don't want any more of that business. It doesn't go in the American army."

He turned on his heel and walked away, while one of the group whispered to his neighbor that Arthur was pretty lucky; the lieutenant could have made a mess of trouble for him if he hadn't happened to be a mighty decent chap.

Sam was not badly hurt, however, for he opened his eyes a moment later, and presently stood up. As a matter of fact Arthur helped him up.

"Sorry I hit you, Unk," he said. "I lost my head when you said that about Joe, and I didn't stop to think what I was doing. You know what I think of Joe, and the thought of anything happening to him makes me crazy."

"I know it, Art," said Sam soberly, while he gingerly felt of his chin. "It was my fault, I guess. Shake hands, will you?"

"I will," said Arthur, and like good Americans and sportsmen, they ended their differences and forgot their quarrel with a handshake.

"And now," exclaimed Arthur, "I'm a-going out to get Joe."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Sergeant Topping, a big red-haired, brawny man. "We've had one man get kilt maybe through a lot of foolishness, and one's enough for to-day."

"But, Sergeant," pleaded Arthur. "He may be wounded and suffering."

"Maybe he is," retorted Sergeant Topping, "though I hope not, but it's his own fault if he is. Look at them bullets flyin' around out there," he exclaimed suddenly. "What chance would you stand?"

The Germans were playing a steady stream of machine gun bullets on the edge of the shell hole where Joe had disappeared. Evidently they were determined that no attempt at rescue should be made if they could help it.

"And they'll keep that up all night," said the sergeant.

"I got to go after him when it gets dusk," exclaimed Arthur. "I can't let him stay out there all night not knowing whether he's dead or alive."

"We'll see," said Topping noncommittally. "But remember; no sneaking out there unless I say you can."

Arthur was disappointed, but in his heart he knew the sergeant was right. The Germans were concentrating their fire so as to prevent any res-

cue parties going out, and while there was yet daylight Arthur realized that to show himself was virtually suicide. But darkness was not far away, and he tried to possess himself in patience.

Night fell, and seldom was there a darker one. Not a star showed itself in the sky, and out in front of the trenches the blackness seemed thick enough to cut with a knife. Machine guns rattled all along the line, while the desolate waste of No Man's Land was lighted every now and then by the lurid flame of blazing rockets sent up to disclose the approach of any hostile raiding parties. Shells crashed and roared out their messages of death and destruction. It was a typical night on the western front.

In the American trenches the soldiers had finished their supper, and were settling down to the night's business.

"There's somethin' in the air," said Sergeant Topping.

"There is," agreed Sam Howe. "And what's in the air is the big attack we're going to cut loose with soon."

"You think so?" said the sergeant eagerly.

"I do," said Sam confidently. "A fellow was telling me just now that he had heard the French and English, and some of our troops too, were

smashing the life out of the Heinies all along the line. It's going to be our turn next."

"I hope so," cried Topping. "The forest up ahead of us is crammed full of Germans, and I'd like to get 'em out."

"We'll start inside of two days. You see if we won't."

"Get 'em out in the open, and then we'll fix 'em. That's the stuff," exclaimed the sergeant. "Gee, I wish we'd start to-night."

"Where's Arthur Nelson?" he said suddenly. "Has he gone out after Joe? Come on, Sam, we'll take a look."

They moved along the trench searching for Arthur. "If he's started without letting me know, there'll be trouble," said Topping sternly. It was Topping, by the way, who had happened by when Arthur dropped the bag of water on the sentry's head. It had been necessary for him to report the culprit, and ever since that day he had never been quite sure what Arthur would be up to next.

"Where's Arthur Nelson?" he inquired of a group of men standing in front of one of the dug-outs.

"Right here, Sergeant," responded Arthur, for he was one of the group.



“All right,” said Topping. “I thought maybe you had started out after Joe.”

“Not yet,” said Arthur. “I was just coming to ask you about it though. It’s about time to start, isn’t it?”

Before Sergeant Topping could reply, however, a strange thing happened. Out of the darkness of No Man’s Land a figure of a man appeared very suddenly. He loomed for an instant against the flare of some “blazing onions” sent up by the Germans, and then hurled himself into the American trench, into the midst of the little group of soldiers.

“Nab him!” shouted Sergeant Topping excitedly. “Fix bayonets, and get ready for any others.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ZERO HOUR

SERGEANT TOPPING was sure that the man who had so unexpectedly and suddenly leaped into their midst was a particularly daring member of a German raiding party, engaged in a surprise attack on the American trenches.

He left his men to deal with their visitor, and dashed along the trench to warn the others, and prepare adequate resistance. He made his way at top speed, bumping into the men, and jostling them up against the side of the narrow trench. A moment later he tripped over a loose board in the flooring and sprawled headlong. Disconcerted, but not dismayed, he scrambled quickly to his feet, and whipping out his revolver set himself to repel attacks.

But aside from the confusion he himself had created, he heard nothing unusual. The men were ready for any Germans who might appear, but none showed themselves. Topping did not under-

stand it. He started to retrace his steps along the trench.

“Get any Germans, Sergeant?” inquired a voice he recognized as belonging to Lieutenant Harold Cook, and he thought he could detect a trace of amusement in it.

“No, sir,” said Topping. “What was it, sir?”

“Only our friend Joe returning,” said Harold.

“He come with such a rush I was sure he was a Heinie,” said the sergeant sheepishly. “The men’ll think I’m a goat, won’t they?”

“I guess not,” Harold assured him. “You can’t go far wrong by taking every precaution, you know. It’s better to play safe than to be the least bit careless.”

The sergeant felt greatly relieved to hear his young lieutenant say this. He had made a mistake, and he was not at all sure that the men would not find some way to make his life miserable as a result. The lieutenant approved of what he had done, however, and it was a great comfort. He saluted, and continued on his way.

“You’re the luckiest man alive,” he heard Sam Howe say.

“Pretty lucky, I’ll admit,” replied a voice he knew as Joe’s.

“To get back without a scratch too,” exclaimed

Sam. "I was sure you was going to get all killed up."

"The ones with nerve always have the luck," chimed in Arthur. "Remember I told you that before."

"I guess that's right," Sam agreed. "It seems to work that way."

"You got your Heinie anyway, Joe, old boy," exclaimed Arthur, as proud of his friend as a hen is of one chick. "That was some scrap."

"We thought he was getting to you," Sergeant Topping broke in. "He sort of had you going there for awhile."

"Joe was bluffing," said Arthur disdainfully.

"Were you, Joe?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes," said Joe modestly. "I pretended I was about all in, just hoping he might get overconfident, and a little careless, and then you see that would give me my chance."

"Which you got and took advantage of," said Arthur.

"He did," agreed Sergeant Topping heartily. "But any man who'll do as risky a thing as that doesn't deserve such luck."

"The ones with nerve always"—began Arthur, when he was interrupted, and the interruption was of such a nature as to drive all thoughts of Joe's

exploit not only from his mind, but from the thoughts of all the other members of the little group as well.

Joe had gone out into No Man's Land, killed his German, hidden in a shell hole until dark, and returned unscathed, an achievement of no mean degree. Lieutenant Cook, however, had just given out word that at quarter of five the following morning the whole regiment was going over the top in a smashing big attack. Every man present wondered how many of them would be as lucky as Joe had been. Every man had his thoughts centered on what was to come.

"Quarter of five, remember," said Harold. "Every man ready, and you better get all the rest you can. This is the real thing."

Those who were not needed for sentry duty turned in and tried to sleep. The long hours dragged themselves out to interminable lengths. Men slept, but only fitfully. Activity along the front was less than usual, but a tense feeling pervaded the air, making real slumber out of the question. No one seemed capable of lying still for more than a few moments at a time. Whispered conversations with one's neighbor were apparently necessary at frequent intervals.



"I wish morning would come," said Arthur softly to Joe.

"Sleep if you can, Art," replied Joe. "You'll need all your strength."

"I can't sleep. What time is it?"

Joe looked at his radiolite wrist watch. "Quarter past three," he replied.

Silence ensued. Arthur lay on his back staring straight up into the sky above him. He tried to stop thinking, but his mind kept busily at work every minute. He wondered what the objective of the attack was to be. Was only his regiment going to participate? Would he survive? How many of his comrades would be dead the following evening? He shut his eyes and again tried to sleep, but it was no use.

"What time is it, Joe?" he whispered, when he thought at least an hour had elapsed.

"Half past three," said Joe. "Go to sleep."

"I can't. I keep thinking all the time."

He was silent as long as he could bear it, and then he inquired the time again. Only fifteen minutes had passed. Would the hour for the attack never come? When four o'clock arrived he gave up all attempt at sleep, and arose to his feet. The trench was crowded with men, stand-

ing quietly, or seated on the firing step, all of them trying to look unconcerned.

“Isn’t the artillery going to get busy before we start?” Arthur inquired petulantly of Joe.

“Don’t know,” said Joe. “I hope so.”

In the early morning light the men’s faces looked ghastly. Their eyes looked hollow, and had circles around them. Lines seemed to have appeared on what were boyish faces the day before. No one wanted to catch his neighbor’s eye, and they avoided one another’s glance. They looked haggard and careworn. Few words were spoken, and what little conversation was held was whispered. Some of the men were busily writing letters on scraps of paper, sending what might be their last message to their loved ones.

Arthur glanced around, and saw Sam Howe looking at him. He tried to smile, but his face felt stiff, and he wondered dimly if his smile could have looked as sickly as Sam’s. He turned away.

“What time is it, Joe?” he asked.

“Almost quarter past,” said Joe.

“Gosh,” exclaimed Arthur, “when’s our artillery going to—”

Before he could complete the sentence, there was a roar as of a thousand thunderstorms, as the guns began to fire, and the earth shook as if it

were about to split in half. The air throbbed and pulsed with the concussion. Overhead the shells screamed as they tore the atmosphere apart in their flight, hurrying to join in the unearthly chorus of explosions taking place in the German lines. Shells of every size went flying over with their message of death to those who had loosed the dogs of war upon a world which desired only peace.

Arthur looked at Joe, who reassured him with a smile. Arthur was not afraid—at least no more so than the next man—but veteran soldiers say there is no man alive who can go through the minutes immediately preceding an attack without being nervous. Human nerves were never designed to absorb the shock of a great bombardment, and not be affected.

Sergeant Topping came down the line, examining every man's equipment for the last time. Lieutenant Harold Cook moved among his men, smiling confidently at them, and cheering them up by his own cheerful manner. No doubt he was nervous too, but he did not show it.

The guns must have been placed wheel to wheel, so continuous was the firing. Ton upon ton of metal went hurtling across No Man's Land at the Germans. And presently the enemy guns began

to return the fire, though feebly in comparison with the terrific bombardment from the American batteries. But a German shell exploded in the trench, not far from the spot where Arthur and Joe were standing, and two of their comrades were instantly changed from human beings into mutilated and misshapen objects hardly recognizable as having once been men.

Arthur shivered, but set his teeth hard. He picked up Joe's left arm, and looked at his wrist watch. Ten minutes more. He wondered if it also meant ten minutes more of life. He tightened his belt, and tried to take in a long breath, but his lungs seemed stopped up. His mouth and tongue felt dry and parched. His ears threatened to burst with the din and roar.

Suddenly the bombardment ceased. It stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The resulting stillness seemed almost noisy. It was unnatural. A bird sang a few notes, and Arthur began to wonder if he was alive or dead; everything seemed queer and unreal.

"Fix bayonets!" came the order, sharp and clear.

A clicking sound ran up and down the trench, as the gleaming knives were snapped into place on the ends of the rifle barrels.

Harold looked at his watch.

“All ready,” he shouted. “Not too fast remember.”

The zero hour had arrived.

## CHAPTER V

### OVER THE TOP

**S**UDDENLY the bombardment recommenced. Simultaneously the air became full of planes, scudding towards the German lines to note the effect of the fire, and to flash reports back to the batteries. Out of the trench swarmed the infantry, and started forward.

Arthur was calmer now. He moved ahead, and was surprised to find himself worrying about keeping in line with his comrades. He saw Sam, white-lipped, but apparently cool, and Joe, his square jaw set determinedly; up ahead was Lieutenant Cook stepping along as if he were on parade. The sight gave him confidence.

In front of them, moving steadily and evenly, was the American barrage. It did not seem to be going very fast, and Arthur wondered how long it would take for them to catch up with it. It was a rather queer attack, he thought; so far he had not even seen a German. Then, appearing from both directions, came tanks, scores of them, as though they had in some mysterious manner sprung out of the ground.



"Slow up there, Murphy," shouted Sergeant Topping to one man, who was getting ahead of his line.

A machine gun opened fire from what had once been the German first-line trench. It was only a short distance ahead now, and one of the tanks lumbering in the direction of the trouble maker silenced it before it had done much damage. Shells burst in back of them, fired by the enemy, and then as the American barrage passed the German first line, the German guns began to bombard their old positions, hoping to catch the Americans in their counter-barrage.

The advancing infantry presently reached the first of the German positions, or at least what remained of them. They did not stop. Squads of "moppers-up" followed in their wake to take care of any of the enemy still left alive.

"It's a regular parade," Arthur announced gleefully to Joe. All feelings of fear had left him. The exhilaration of success was in his blood; he was enjoying himself hugely, and any thought of death had left him. That too in spite of the fact that the fifth man on his right had just been hit by a shell splinter, and was down, groaning and writhing with pain.

They had advanced through almost a quarter of

a mile of the former German positions, and had been practically unopposed. But now machine-gun emplacements which had survived the shelling began to make trouble. Tanks were busy blotting out these pests, but they were numerous and slowed the attackers up considerably. They had to be dealt with one at a time. The Americans had now reached the outskirts of a thick wood out of which poured a veritable hail of machine-gun bullets.

The result was that instead of going forward in any sort of order the Yankees had to split up into squads, and rush the machine gunners if they could not be silenced in any other way.

“There goes a pigeon,” shouted Arthur suddenly.

Sure enough, high above their heads, a homer appeared flying swiftly towards the German lines. Joe swore, and though he realized it was futile he raised his rifle and fired at the swiftly moving bird. Undisturbed it continued its flight over the battlefield.

“The message that bird carries will mean trouble for us,” cried Joe wrathfully. “If we could only find the sender.”

The pigeon soon disappeared eastward, and the two friends presently found themselves in com-

pany with Lieutenant Cook and "Uncle Sam" Howe engaged in the task of putting an end to the existence of a machine-gun nest.

"We'll come on it one from each side," said Harold. "Split up. Have your grenades ready. I'll try to attract their attention in front, and you others are to creep up on them, one from behind, and one from each side. Be careful and make it sure."

They were in the woods now, and the undergrowth was heavy. The machine-gun nest seemed to be established in a small ravine some hundred yards distant. Harold lay down behind a fallen tree while Sam started off in one direction, and Arthur and Joe in the other. Their progress was necessarily slow, for they could not afford to be seen, and they had to make a wide detour.

Harold had estimated that perhaps fifteen minutes would be sufficient time to allow the others to reach their stations, and so at the end of that time he acted. The machine gun had been silent for some time, for no Americans had been visible to afford a target. Harold's one fear was that the gun crew might think they had been left behind by the advance, and move on themselves. He decided to find out, and the method he used was a simple one, an old Indian trick in fact.

He removed his steel helmet, and placing it on the end of a stick raised it until it showed just above the tops of the bushes. Meanwhile he lay on his back behind the fallen tree trunk, which was thick enough to be impervious to machine-gun bullets.

At first nothing happened. Harold moved it a bit, and the movement was greeted instantly by a volley of bullets. They zipped through the bushes, and one of them striking the helmet sent it spinning off through the underbrush.

“Well, Fritzie,” said Harold to himself grimly. “You’re still on the job I see.”

He rolled over, and began to wriggle his way along the ground to retrieve his helmet. He soon possessed himself of it, and crawled back to his station behind the log.

Presently he repeated the process, and again the sight of the helmet drew the fire of the German gun.

Meanwhile the three soldiers were creeping through the woods in a wide detour to approach from the sides and rear the ravine where the gun was stationed. Joe and Arthur crept along side by side, using every effort to conceal their presence.

"I hope we don't run into another," whispered Arthur. "The woods must be full of them."

"Likely so," responded Joe. "Keep low."

They traveled in a circle. When they had covered about one hundred and fifty yards, a sudden burst of fire from the gun halted them, and they sprawled flat on the ground.

"Were they shooting at us?" whispered Arthur.

"Doubt it," said Joe. "The lieutenant said he'd attract their attention, you know."

"I hope they didn't get him."

"Not a chance," said Joe confidently. "You stay here now, and let me go on."

"I'll go on myself."

"No, you stay here," repeated Joe, and without waiting for his companion to interpose any further objection, he started ahead.

"Give me ten minutes," said Joe, as he moved away. "Then we'll close in."

It seemed to Arthur, with whom Joe had left his watch, that it was about the longest ten minutes he had ever passed, almost as long as the minutes before the attack that morning. That seemed long ago now, and Arthur wondered how the attack was progressing; well in his own particular sector, he knew, but of course a soldier is con-

cerned only with what takes place in his immediate neighborhood, and has no way to judge of operations as a whole.

Again the machine gun broke forth with its insistent rat-a-tat-tat and Arthur felt sure that Joe must have been discovered. If he had known, however, it was merely his young lieutenant showing his helmet to the Germans again. The roar and noise of battle sounded all about him, but everything seemed far away, and he thought only of the machine gun in which they were so interested.

He glanced at his watch. The ten minutes were up. Exercising every caution he began to crawl forward. A few dried leaves were on the ground, and it seemed to Arthur that they made a frightful noise. No sound of activity came from the machine gun, however, and he continued his progress as quietly as he could. He came to the edge of the ravine in which, farther along, the machine gun was located. He could see only a few yards ahead, and could not be sure how far distant his objective was.

Suddenly he heard the explosion of a hand grenade. Evidently one of his companions had reached the position, and the noise seemed extremely close at hand.



The machine gun broke forth again, and Arthur could hear the bullets crashing through the underbrush to his left. He sprang to his feet, and dashed forward. Not a hundred feet ahead he saw the machine gun, and its crew, all with their backs to him, working their weapon feverishly, spraying the ground in front of them with bullets. They were firing in the direction from which Sam was due to appear. Arthur also noticed that one of the Germans was lying on the ground, still and silent.

Then Arthur saw Joe suddenly appear on the other side of the ravine, draw back his right arm and hurl another grenade. His aim was somewhat wild, and while he saw one of the Germans clutch his left shoulder as though it hurt him, no one of the crew was incapacitated. Five men still remained.

The gun was swung in Joe's direction, and the fire concentrated in an effort to account for him. Joe, however, had disappeared from sight the moment he had hurled his grenade. Whether a bullet had hit him or not could not be seen. But it was now Arthur's turn and he too flung a grenade at the German gun. An instant after its explosion it was followed by a second, and then a third. In surprise Arthur observed that one had come

from his young lieutenant, who had stolen forward unobserved, and the other from Sam, who had reappeared, apparently untouched by the German fire.

Down went three Germans. The gun stopped firing, and the two remaining members of the crew decided they had had enough. This bombardment from four sides was too much for them.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" they shouted, holding up their hands, and turning first in one direction, and then in another, not quite sure from which direction their attackers were coming.

The four Americans hurried forward,—four of them because Joe had reappeared and to Arthur's great joy was unwounded,—while Harold kept the two Germans covered with his revolver.

"Disarm them," he ordered.

Sam and Arthur made a hasty search of their prisoners, and found them both without weapons. Joe was examining the four boches who lay on the ground, and every one of them was dead. The remarkable part of the occurrence was that while four men had been killed by the hand grenades, the two prisoners were unwounded.

"We've got to send these two men back," said Harold disgustedly.

He did not want to leave the fighting, and he

knew the three men with him felt the same way. He hated to order them back, and he half hoped one of them would volunteer. But he got no response.

"Sam," he began, "I'm sorry, but—"

Just then they heard some one approaching, and immediately took steps to defend themselves in case it should turn out to be one of the enemy. To their relief, however, the newcomer proved to be an American soldier, a man who had been wounded in the arm and carried the disabled member in a sling. He was on his way back to a dressing station.

"This man can take the prisoners back, sir," suggested Sam wistfully.

"I guess he can," Harold agreed.

"Like some company on the road in?" he asked the man.

"Yes, sir," replied the soldier. "How many?"

"Only two."

"Wish there was a thousand," he exclaimed. "Say," he added gleefully, "the Heinies are certainly catching it up ahead."

Joe, Arthur, and Sam could not help but show their impatience to be off, at this intelligence. Harold smiled as he saw it.

"Turn these two prisoners in for us," he or-

dered the wounded man. "Hope you're not badly hurt."

"Arm's broke," said the soldier. "Just my luck."

"Don't let 'em get away from you," said Harold, as he moved away.

"No chance," was the confident reply.

Harold and his three men hurried on to join in the fighting again, for it had moved on ahead of them since they had had their adventure with the German machine gun.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEWCOMERS

A HEAD of them was a town, or to be more exact the ruins of what had once been a town. It was under bombardment, and explosions could be seen taking place in every part of it.

The roads leading to it were dotted with soldiers, some of them returning wounded. Ambulances tore past carrying the human wreckage from the battlefield to the hospitals which waited to receive it. Across the fields, over the *débris* of what had once been German trench fortifications little groups of American soldiers were hurrying to catch up with the advance, having been left behind as were our four friends.

A squadron of cavalry dashed by in a cloud of dust, intending to press through the gap which apparently had been made in the German lines. These horsemen could then cut off straggling groups of Germans, follow the retreating enemy

as closely as possible, act as scouts, and generally keep their commanders in touch with what was taking place at the most advanced points.

"They look fine," exclaimed Sam enthusiastically.

"They do," Arthur agreed, "but I think I'd rather have my feet on the ground. I don't like horses, to ride on anyway," he added soberly.

At that moment a battery of field artillery came up the road in a cloud of dust, the horses flecked with foam and straining powerfully in the traces, while their riders lashed them and urged them on to even greater efforts. Just before they reached the spot where our four friends were standing they swerved off into a nearby field, the crews sprang to the ground, unlimbered the guns, and in an almost incredibly short space of time the guns were in action.

The noise was deafening. The Germans by this time had somewhat recovered from the first shock of the attack and had brought their artillery into play once more. Shells exploded all around Harold and his three men as they hurried forward. A wounded soldier came along the road; his head was bandaged and the bandage showed red; he also limped badly.

"Gas ahead," he announced.



“Put your masks on, boys,” Harold ordered, putting on his own.

They left the road and took to the fields. The enemy was shelling the road heavily, hoping to prevent the passage of troops and supplies designed for the men in the advanced positions. Nor did they forsake the road a moment too soon. A huge motor lorry going forward had reached a spot just about where our four friends would have been had they not changed their course, when a shell burst squarely upon it. There was a tremendous explosion, and the truck disappeared from the face of the earth in a cloud of dirt, pebbles, and wreckage. A hole was all that marked the spot where it had been.

The four soldiers hurried on the faster. They could not talk on account of the masks they wore, but the young lieutenant led the way, his three men following closely at his heels. They came nearer the ruined town. Street fighting was in progress there, the sound of grenades, rifles, and machine guns being recognizable above the noise of the artillery.

American soldiers were systematically going from house to house, bombing the Germans out of the cellars where they were hiding. Most of them waited for not more than one grenade, and then

came hurrying out, their hands above their heads, eager to surrender.

The western end of the village seemed cleared of the enemy, and Harold hurried with his little party towards the opposite side where the Germans still were holding out. As they passed a ruined house, the roof gone and one side falling down, a German suddenly appeared at one of the second story windows and fired his rifle point blank at the little group. Then he disappeared. Luckily his shot went wild.

Without a moment's hesitation Joe dashed into the entrance and started up the stairs. Arthur was at his heels. Sam and Harold guarded the doorways through which the German might try to escape, Harold at the front, and Sam at the rear. Nor had they long to wait for something to happen. As Harold stood guard the German's rifle came flying out of the window and strangely enough landed bayonet-down in the tiny front yard, and remained sticking straight up.

But a stranger thing still was to follow. The next thing to come out of the window was the German himself. Harold, looking up at the window, saw Joe lift his enemy clear of the floor, and then in concert with Arthur, who held the Ger-

man's feet, give a great heave and pitch him straight out the opening. The German lit squarely on his head, rolled over limply, and lay still.

At that moment a squad of soldiers went by without gas masks. Harold immediately removed his, and after sniffing the air carefully decided it was perfectly safe to breathe.

"Well," he exclaimed as Joe and Arthur appeared. "What's the idea of throwing men out of windows?"

"Is he dead?" demanded Joe.

"As a door nail," said Harold simply.

"Why did you throw him out?" inquired Sam, who had just removed his mask and joined his companions again.

"He showed fight," said Joe. "He was hiding behind an old screen when we went into the room and tried to hit Art here over the head with the butt of his gun, so we took it away from him and threw it out the window."

"Joe jumped him and got that gun in about two seconds," said Arthur admiringly. "Poor Heinie didn't know what happened."

"He still wanted to fight," continued Joe, paying no attention to the interruption and compli-

ments of his small companion. "I hate to stick a man or hit him over the head in cold blood, so we thought we'd just toss him out of the window."

"It seemed to work," said Harold grimly.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe in a tone of voice that a man would use in agreeing that it was a nice day. Killing Germans was just a part of the army routine. He had come to France to kill Germans, and that was what he was doing. He took it all in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner.

"Come along," urged Harold, and started on once more, heading towards a plain beyond the town where little groups of Americans and Germans were at hand-to-hand grips. Where their own regiment was they had no idea, nor had they any time to look for it.

The shell fire was not so intense as it had been. The two opposing forces were so mixed up and intermingled that the artillery did not dare to fire lest they hit their own men. Tanks, machine guns, rifles, grenades, bayonets, and even bare hands were the weapons being used.

Harold led his little band forward until a machine-gun nest in front of them forced them to take cover. They ensconced themselves in a shell hole, and awaited developments. Also they par-

took of some of their rations, for they had not eaten since early that morning, and had not realized before how hungry they were.

Arthur lay on his back, and gazed into the sky.

"This is the life," he exclaimed. "We fixed 'em to-day all right. I never saw so many dead Germans in my life."

"Several prisoners too," added Sam enthusiastically.

"Several hundred you mean," corrected Joe.

"I don't believe in taking prisoners," said Arthur. "You've got to feed 'em."

"Well, I've never noticed that you took"—Joe began when a strange thing happened, so strange and so unexpected that he forgot all about what he had been planning to say.

"Look," cried Arthur, starting up. "For heaven's sake!"

A pigeon, one wing broken, fluttered over the side of the shell hole, and striving desperately to control its actions finally slid exhausted to the bottom of the pit. Its bright bead-like eyes looked frightened and its spasmodic efforts to use its broken wing were pitiful to see.

"Poor little fellow," exclaimed Harold.

"Hit by a splinter of shrapnel, I guess," said

Joe. "He must have gotten in the way of some anti-aircraft gun."

"Wring its neck, and put it out of its suffering," said Harold. "There's nothing we can do about it."

Arthur picked the warm little body up in one hand, and with one quick twist broke the pigeon's neck, thus ending its misery and pain. He then handed the dead bird to Harold.

"There's a message on its leg," he announced.

Harold unwound the little cylinder of oiled paper which was tied around the pigeon's leg. He spread it out, and looked at it curiously, while his three companions looked on in silence.

"Written in German," Harold announced at length.

"It's one of them birds that's been flying over us lately," said Arthur with great conviction.

"Any one of you read German?" Harold asked.

His three companions all replied in the negative, so he placed the little sheet of paper in his pocket until the time when he should meet some one who could read the enemy's language.

"It's one of them birds that's been flying over us lately," Arthur repeated.

"Might have been dropped out of some German plane," said Joe. "Who knows?"



"I don't believe it," said Arthur stoutly.

Sam meanwhile was on guard, peering gingerly over the rim of the shell crater.

"Here come a couple of officers," he announced suddenly.

His three companions joined him in looking out over the battlefield. It was growing dark, but objects could still be made out with fair accuracy. Two men were hurrying in their direction, dodging along behind every bit of available cover, and at times prostrating themselves flat on the ground.

"Aviators," said Arthur, recognizing their uniforms.

"Must have been shot down," said Harold. "A machine gun will get them if they're not careful."

As he spoke a German machine gun opened fire on the two officers, and they threw themselves flat on the ground for safety. They were not more than thirty feet distant from the shell hole now, but thirty feet is a long distance to go when it is necessary to pass through a rain of machine-gun bullets.

"Lay low," called Arthur, fearing for the officers' safety.

"Lay low yourself, and quit hollering," advised Joe. "They know what they are doing."

Even now the two officers were worming their

way forward, moving slowly of course, but evidently trusting to the rough ground, and the gathering darkness to protect them. The Germans did not fire continuously now. Every few seconds they sent a volley towards the spot where the officers lay as a warning to them to stay still, but they did not reckon on Yankee nerve.

Suddenly, just as the machine gun ceased firing one of its bursts the two officers sprang to their feet and dashed forward. In two jumps they had reached the shell hole, and slid over the edge to safety.

"That's nerve," cried Joe approvingly, and hastened to help the prostrate figures to their feet.

He lifted one of them up. The newly arrived officer looked about him, and then seeing Harold standing in front of him, uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Harold," he cried.

"Hugh," exclaimed Harold. "For heaven's sake."

But a still greater surprise was to come. The other officer had started at the words, and then suddenly flung his arms about Harold's neck.

"A great place to meet your brother," he cried delightedly.

"Bob!" Harold managed to say. "For heaven's sake."

## CHAPTER VII

### A REUNION

**B**OB COOK was right. It was a strange place to meet one's brother, and needless to say the meeting was most unexpected. And that with Bob should be Hugh McLeod, his best friend, and a neighbor of the Cooks back home in High Ridge seemed even more extraordinary. It made quite a reunion gathering.

"Keep a sharp watch there, Sam," ordered Harold, and then he turned to his brother to demand an explanation of his unlooked-for appearance.

"Where did you come from?" he inquired eagerly.

"We were up observing," said Bob, for he and Hugh were aviators, and wore the double wings on their breasts. "We ran out of gas and had to land. We weren't sure just where we were. Since this open fighting started it's hard to say whether you're in your own territory or behind the German lines. We had a hunch we were behind the Boche lines though."

"It soon turned out to be more than a hunch," Hugh put in grimly.

"It sure did," said Bob. "We saw a squad of Heinies coming in our direction, and as they were too many for us, we decided we'd better be moving."

"Didn't they see you?" inquired Harold.

"I guess they did," said Bob, "but we didn't wait to make sure. We skipped. We hid in some woods all the rest of the day, and incidentally we could hear the fighting coming closer and closer to us."

"A good sign," said Hugh. "We knew that the Huns must be being driven back."

"If you'd waited long enough maybe we'd have come to you, instead of you coming to us," said Harold.

"We couldn't wait," laughed Bob. "It's not much fun to be caught that way when you know your own men are only a short distance away."

"How long did it take you to get here after you landed?" Harold asked. It was now almost dark and very difficult to see, but the two brothers sat close beside each other in the shell crater—perfectly content to feel that they were together.

"Well," said Bob, "we stayed in those woods until night, and then we traveled most all night.

This morning we took to cover again, but along about noontime we decided that the only thing for us to do was to try to get through. And so we started. Here we are."

"Had anything to eat?" Harold inquired anxiously.

"Not since this morning," said Hugh.

"I've got lots," cried Joe and Arthur in one voice. The same thought was in the minds of both apparently. They adored their lieutenant, and though they had never seen his brother before, they knew him by reputation, and the fact that he was Harold's brother was enough for them. By the same process of reasoning they welcomed Hugh because he was a friend of Harold's brother.

"No soldier ever has 'lots' of food," laughed Bob. "You're probably just as hungry as I am."

"No, we're not. Really," Joe insisted, and he pressed a portion of his precious rations on Bob. Harold and Arthur meanwhile were also offering food to the two young aviators and it was not long before their immediate wants were supplied.

Sam all this time had been on guard. Darkness had fallen, and with its coming the fighting had died down. But no one supposed that this condition was by any means permanent. In fact they expected the exact opposite.

“There’s something in the air,” observed Bob presently.

“I feel it too,” said Harold. “Something’s going to pop around here before long. Hadn’t you two better be getting on back?”

“Fine chance of that,” cried Bob. “You don’t think I’m going to find my brother like this, and then leave him right away, do you? If you do you’ve got another guess.”

At that moment a terrific bombardment by the American artillery started. The ground shook under it, while the night was illumined by the flashes of the guns and the dull glow of the bursting shells. It was evident that the Germans were to be granted no time to reorganize.

“Well, I guess you can’t get back now even if you want to,” Harold shouted in his brother’s ear. “Have you got any arms?”

“Automatic pistols,” Bob replied.

“They’ll help,” said Harold. “Stick with us.”



## CHAPTER VIII

### THIRTY FEET OF DEATH

**T**O the westward was the Argonne Forest, a veritable tangle of underbrush and jungle. Little ravines ran through it at frequent intervals, and it was infested with German machine-gun nests. It was impossible to get artillery through its tangled mazes, and while certain machine-gun battalions and regiments of infantry were fighting their way through the forest the main allied efforts were to the east and west. The Americans were advancing along its eastern edge, and the French the western. When they should both approach the other end of the forest the Germans would have to get out or be captured.

“On to Sedan,” cried Harold enthusiastically.

“A long way to go yet,” said Bob.

“Not so long as it is hard, I guess,” Harold remarked.

“Yes, sirree,” exclaimed Bob. “When you get up against a real regiment of Germans I imagine you’ve got about the stiffest opposition any one could wish for.”

“What time is this attack coming off, I wonder?” said Hugh. He was more interested in what was taking place in his immediate vicinity than he was in discussing the fighting qualities of German troops. He knew all about that anyway.

“I wish we were where we could find out,” said Harold.

“Something doing out here, sir,” exclaimed Sam suddenly.

The other members of the little band hiding in the shell hole immediately sprang to their feet at this warning, and lined the edge of the crater, peering cautiously over the edge.

“What do you see?” demanded Harold.

“I saw some figures moving around out there, sir,” said Sam, pointing towards the German lines.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How many were there?”

“It looked like quite a party to me, sir,” said Sam.

“I’ll go out and see, Lieutenant,” exclaimed Joe eagerly.

“All right,” Harold agreed. “Don’t get reckless, and don’t stay away too long.”

“Yes, sir,” said Joe, and without further ado, he swung a leg over the edge of the shell hole, crawled rapidly away, and was soon lost in the darkness.

His companions waited, conversing only at infrequent intervals, and scarcely moving. Their eyes were fixed straight ahead in an effort to see what was taking place on the battlefield before them. The artillery roared and crashed ceaselessly.

Minutes passed, until a half hour had elapsed. But there was no sign of Joe, nor of Germans either. Harold began to get worried.

“Shall I go look for him, sir?” inquired Arthur, always anxious for the well-being of his pal.

“No,” said Harold. “Not yet.”

“How long is this bombardment going to last?” exclaimed Bob at length. “How far are we from the German lines anyway?”

“I think we’re in them,” Harold replied shortly.

“‘In them.’ What do you mean?”

“Simply that at this particular point we are surrounded on three sides by German machine-gun positions.”

“How did they get there?” Hugh demanded.

“It wasn’t like that this afternoon, was it?”

"No," said Harold, "but in the darkness I think the Huns have pushed their lines forward. That was probably one of their machine-gun squads that Sam saw."

"Lucky for us they didn't happen to choose this shell hole for one of their positions," remarked Hugh soberly.

"Luck and nothing else," said Harold.

"I wish Joe would come back," muttered Arthur.

The bombardment continued with undiminished intensity. The night had been overcast, but now the moon broke through a rift in the clouds, and shed its pale light over the battlefield. A moment later it was obscured again, but soon it reappeared evidently prepared to stay. Its ghostly rays gave everything a weird and misshapen appearance; stumps of trees looked like Germans, while patches of bushes looked like whole companies of the enemy.

"Maybe there isn't going to be any attack," Hugh suggested. "It may be that our artillery is just throwing a scare into the Heinies so they won't remove any troops from this sector."

"And the principal attack is coming somewhere else you mean?" questioned Bob.

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"What do you think of that, Harold?" asked Bob of his brother.

"It's perfectly possible," Harold agreed. "One thing is sure anyway, and that is that we are cut off from the main body of our forces."

Suddenly the bombardment ceased. The silence which ensued was all the more noticeable on account of the terrific noise which had preceded it. For a moment no one in the shell hole spoke. The cessation of the artillery firing had left them in a semi-dazed condition.

"What's up now?" queried Bob, the first to speak.

"Listen," said Hugh.

The sound of cheering, of mad, frenzied yelling came to their ears. Nor did it seem to come from any great distance.

"Our boys are on their way," said Harold. "Hear 'em yell."

The German machine guns broke loose. The shell hole, where the little band of five Americans had sought refuge seemed entirely surrounded by them. The sharp rat-tat-tat-tat of the rapid firers sounded incessantly in their ears. The moon shed just enough light to make it certain that any one of the band who exposed himself would be seen and shot down instantly.

"Where can Joe be?" exclaimed Arthur anxiously.

"Dead or a prisoner probably," said Sam.

"Shut up, you gol darned pessimist," cried Arthur. "You're the worst gloom I ever saw in all my life."

"Well. then he got lost," said Sam sullenly. "Have it that way if it suits you better."

The two soldiers relapsed into silence; Arthur strained his ears for any sound of Joe returning, while Sam listened with great satisfaction to the yells of the Yankee infantrymen, plainly coming nearer all the time. Sam was not really a pessimist; rather he was a fatalist. In other words, he believed that every chance was in favor of a man's getting killed. Further, he believed that the time when death should come was all planned out in advance and no one could do anything to change that time by even the fraction of a second. It was fate that had put him in the army, it was fate that had led him to this shell hole in France. He believed that he would be killed, that he would never get home again. But he had resigned himself to it, and be it said in his favor that he was not afraid. Sam had faults, but he was no coward.

He believed that every other soldier had been sent to France to die. He somehow expected them



all to be killed, and the curious part of it was that he expected them all to be killed right away. So it was that when Joe had gone out into No Man's Land alone he had expected that fate had arranged for him to be killed that afternoon. At the present time, when Joe had not returned, Sam felt positive that this time surely he would not come back. It was a strange state of mind he had acquired, and the most remarkable part about it was that he still kept happy.

Arthur thought Sam a "gloom," because he himself was a thorough optimist. Half of his conversation had to do with his plans for after the war. He had never seriously considered being killed. In spite of the fact that he was living with death, he did not expect it to claim him. It was for this reason perhaps that he became so worried when it was suggested to him that any serious harm had befallen Joe.

"Hear 'em yell," cried Bob. "They sound as though they were going straight through to Berlin."

The American barrage preceded the advancing troops, and shells dropped all about the crater where the five Yankees were hidden. That afternoon they had not thought they were so far advanced, but being out of touch with their main

body they had somehow been left stranded in the enemy lines. It was a bad situation and certainly no man wants to be killed by his own guns. Yet that was what might happen unless the American troops went ahead so fast that their protecting barrage fire moved on out of range very soon.

“They’re coming closer,” exclaimed Hugh.

“I hope they get here soon,” said Harold fervently.

“Yes,” said Bob. “I want to get into this scrap. This business of being pinned in a shell hole is poor fun.”

“Where’s Joe, I wonder?” exclaimed Arthur. He was standing on the slope of the hole, his head just below the rim, so as to be out of range of the hostile machine guns. He gripped a grenade in his right hand, while every nerve in his body was tense, as he waited for the return of his comrade.

Bang, bang, bang went the machine guns all about them. It seemed as if they were in the very hottest part of the fighting; as though they were the pivot about which the whole battle revolved. And then Joe reappeared. He slid over the edge of the shell hole, dragging a machine gun with him.

“Joe!” exclaimed Arthur rapturously. “Where did you come from?”

Joe turned to Harold. “I met up with some of

our own men, sir," he said. "I told them about our being trapped in the shell hole, and suggested that if we had a machine gun here we might be able to do some damage to the Heinies. They gave me the gun, and here it is. I couldn't bring any ammunition, but they promised to send it to us at once."

"Good work, Joe," said Harold. "I'm afraid there'll be some trouble getting ammunition to us though. The Germans must have seen you come up. Just listen to those bullets flying around out there."

"They promised to bring it," said Joe. "It's only thirty feet away in another shell hole."

"As near as that?" exclaimed Harold in surprise.

"Yes, sir. Shall I go after it?"

"No," said Harold. "You've done your part. Besides it's almost certain death to show yourself out there."

Sam, however, had arranged it so he could see what was happening. He had found three large square stones in the shell hole and had placed them on its edge, on the side towards the German positions. They afforded just enough protection to allow him to see over the rim of the crater without being seen himself by the enemy.

"Any one coming with cartridges?" inquired Joe.

"Don't see any one," said Sam.

Joe and Arthur set to work to examine the machine gun that Joe had brought in and put it in working condition.

"Here comes some one," cried Sam suddenly, as a figure suddenly appeared out of the neighboring shell hole, and darted forward. The soldier was carrying some heavy object, as was apparent from his attitude.

"Fine!" exclaimed Joe. "We'll fix 'em from here."

"He's down," Sam announced. "No one can live through that hail of bullets."

The soldier carrying the box of cartridges had advanced scarcely more than three or four feet when he had been struck by a German bullet, and sent sprawling headlong to the earth.

"Another's trying it," announced Sam a moment later.

"He's down too," he cried, almost immediately. "He'd hardly picked up the box the other fellow dropped."

"It can't be done, I'm afraid," said Harold. "I hope they won't try any more."

"I'd like to try it, sir," said Joe.

"No, Joe," said Harold. "It would be foolish. In order to get that box you'd have to go out and back. Those fellows over there only have to go one way, and if they can't make it what chance would you have, having to go twice as far?"

"Here comes another," cried Sam.

"Gosh, what nerve," exclaimed Bob.

"He's down," said Sam. "Three gone." His voice was sing-song as if he were announcing results on Election Day night.

"Number four is starting," he cried presently. "He's down too."

"Why don't they stop it?" demanded Harold. "It seems so useless."

"But brave," said Hugh.

"'Brave' is no name for it," Bob agreed.

"Number five is trying now," Sam announced in his monotonous tone. "He's crawling flat on his stomach. I can hardly see him."

He was silent for a few moments. Then, "He's reached the box, I think," he reported. Harold and his companions waited anxiously for further news. Joe in his wanderings had located the positions of two of the German machine guns and they all felt that given a supply of cartridges for their own gun they could make it so hot for the enemy he would be forced to withdraw.

“He’s coming ahead,” said Sam. “He may make it, but he’s awful slow.”

He strained his eyes towards the patch of black shadow which denoted the fifth American “dough-boy” to attempt to cross that thirty feet of death. Slowly, almost imperceptibly the shadow came forward. Sam held his breath. Was he going to make it after all? Suddenly there was a sharp crack, audible even above the noise of the battle. A bullet had struck the brave messenger, and even in the dim light Sam could see that the black shadow had collapsed limply.

“They got him,” he announced briefly.

“How far away is he?” asked Harold.

“About fifteen feet,” said Sam. “He was half way here.”

“I’ll get those cartridges myself,” exclaimed Bob suddenly.

“Bob, you’re crazy,” cried his brother.

“No, I’m not either,” said Bob. “You watch me.”

The sounds of shouting had died away. Machine guns still kept up their incessant rattle, and shells exploded a short distance away. The battle had subsided into the grim business of killing, and in this particular spot it was the Americans who were being killed. Their advance was held up by



the German machine guns posted nearby, and if they were to go ahead again those machine guns had to be silenced. The means with which to do it was only fifteen feet away.

Bob climbed to the edge of the shell hole, and prepared to fare forth on his perilous errand.

## CHAPTER IX

### ON AGAIN

“PLEASE don’t go, Bob,” Harold urged. “You haven’t a chance.”

Bob, however, paid no attention to this appeal. In fact, he gave no sign of having heard.

“Take hold of my right foot, somebody, and give me a boost,” he said.

Arthur sprang forward and made a stirrup of his hands. With this assistance, and grasping a tuft of grass in each hand, Bob pulled himself over the edge of the shell hole.

“Any one more coming from the shell hole, Sam?” inquired Harold. He could not help but hope that some one else would appear to bring in the ammunition and thus make his brother’s attempt unnecessary.

“No, sir,” said Sam.

Bob began to worm his way forward. He stretched out his hands until he found some tuft of grass, and then holding on to it firmly, dragged himself ahead a few inches. Then he repeated the process.

"Moon's gone under," said Hugh suddenly.  
"That may help."

"Let's hope so," said Harold fervently.

Bullets from the German guns still whipped across the narrow space of ground between the two shell holes occupied by the Americans. The steady "sug" as they struck the ground was not a pleasant sound to hear, and it seemed a forlorn hope on which Bob was embarked.

"Can you see him, Sam?" asked Harold.

"Yes, sir. He's still going ahead."

"How close is he to the box?"

"Only a few feet, sir. I can't see the box for sure."

In breathless anxiety the little band waited. Could it be possible that Bob would succeed where five others had failed? True, the moon had disappeared, and it would be correspondingly more difficult for the Germans to see him, but the chances were all in favor of their keeping up their fire on that spot. As a matter of fact that was what they were doing. If Bob could hug the ground closely enough he might escape. But it seemed a very slim chance indeed.

"See him?" asked Harold.

"No, sir," said Sam.

Still they waited. The minutes dragged by,

while the bullets from the German machine guns sang ceaselessly all about them.

"I see him," cried Sam. "No," he corrected himself a moment later, "it's one of them other fellows. He must be wounded, and he moved."

"Poor devil," exclaimed Harold.

"Bob ought to be back by this time," said Hugh fearfully.

"He ought," Harold agreed. "Do you suppose he could have been hit and we not know it?"

"There's an awful mess of bullets flying around out there," said Hugh.

Suddenly, from the direction of the enemy machine guns came the sharp pop of bursting hand grenades. Simultaneously the guns ceased firing.

"What's up?" demanded Hugh excitedly.

"Some gol darned doughboy who doesn't care whether he gets killed or not has gone and plumped a couple o' bombs into them Germans, I guess," Joe remarked laconically.

"They're swarmin' out of that next shell hole," cried Sam.

"Who is?" queried Harold.

"Them Americans that was in it."

"Come on," shouted Harold, and led the way out of the crater.

"Look out there," cried a voice almost under

his feet. It was Bob half way back with the box of cartridges. He had crawled forward, and was returning feet first, not having dared to turn around for fear of being seen.

"Somebody has silenced those German machine guns," exclaimed Harold. "Come on. Our men are going forward again."

"But our machine gun," Bob protested. "I've got the ammunition for it now."

"It's busted," said Joe.

"What's that?" demanded Bob.

"It's busted," Joe repeated. "After you started out I found that one of the parts is missing. The gol darned old thing."

"And five men were killed trying to bring cartridges to it," said Hugh. "What an awful shame."

"Can't be helped now," cried Harold. "Come along."

Somebody had surely silenced the German machine guns. Later they found out that four American privates had done it. Two had started for each gun, equipped with hand grenades. They had crawled in a wide circle to get behind the positions and though of one pair one man had been killed and his companion wounded so badly that he died later he had lived long enough to accom-

plish his purpose. He had thrown three grenades, and then died. But he had killed two Germans, wounded two, and put the other members of the gun crew to flight. Strangely enough the other two Americans had carried out their assignment equally successfully and neither of them had received so much as a scratch. Such is the fortune of war.

Scurrying, dodging, yelling figures were all about them. Harold led his little band ahead, joining forces with the other American troops, and on they went for a considerable distance unopposed. It was exciting work, going across unfamiliar ground in the pitch dark, not knowing at what moment they might come face to face with the enemy.

But this advance did not continue indefinitely. When a quarter of a mile had been covered the Americans found great broad strips of barbed wire in front of them. On both sides were woods, and in the woods were scores of machine guns. It was useless to attempt to go ahead, and the order was given to halt.

An abandoned German trench was occupied, and sentries were posted. The men not required to stay awake wrapped themselves in their blankets, and were asleep almost immediately. When



morning came they knew there was work to be done, harder work perhaps than they had ever done before, and the more rest they had the better off they would be.

“I must locate our regiment,” said Harold anxiously, “and I haven’t the faintest idea where it is.”

“You can’t find it now,” said Bob. “You’d better go to sleep.”

This was good advice and Harold took it. He lay on damp, rough ground, but it did not keep him awake. He was soon asleep and all of his little party with him. These boys had iron nerves and feared few things on this earth, but if they had known what the morrow held in store for them it is doubtful if they would have slept so soundly.

## CHAPTER X

### OVER THE WIRE

**M**ORNING dawned clear and cold. There was a touch of frost in the air, but the American soldiers were not bothered by it; they scarcely noticed it for that matter. In the miraculous way in which it always did things the commissary department had a hot breakfast ready for every man in the line. Steaming, black coffee served to warm the blood, and the men were on edge with excitement. Adventure was ahead. And so was death.

Harold and his band ate their breakfast in the old German trench. The first streaks of day were in the sky, and the sun was just appearing over the fringe of the forest trees.

"A wonderful day," Bob observed.

"Yes," Harold agreed, "and it strikes me that you two fliers had better be getting on back to your squadron unless you want to be reported as absent without leave."

"But we want to stay, and see the fun," Hugh protested.

"You've no business here, you know," Harold reminded him.

"Aren't we fighting the Germans?" demanded Bob, swallowing a great mouthful of coffee which was so hot it made tears come to his eyes. "That's what we're in the war for."

"But you're supposed to fight in the air."

"You may be right," sighed Bob. He glanced overhead. "It's a great day for flying," he observed. "Look at that pigeon. I envy him."

"A pigeon," cried Arthur. "It's another one sent out by them German spies."

"What German spies?" demanded Bob, excited at once.

"Pigeons have been flying over our lines for the past two weeks," said Arthur. "Somebody in our rear has been sending them out with messages for the Germans."

"How do you know?"

"Because after one goes over, the Heinies' artillery gets busy right away and they have the range on us too."

"Are you sure they're not released from airplanes?" Hugh asked.

"We don't see German planes around at the same time," Harold explained. "It certainly looks queer."

"How about that message we took off that bird last night, Lieutenant?" said Joe.

"This is getting interesting," exclaimed Bob. "Where did you get hold of a bird last night?"

"It had a broken wing and fluttered into the shell hole where we were, before you came," Joe explained. "There was a message tied to its leg and when we took it off we found that the god darned thing was written in German."

"Where's the message now?" inquired Bob. "What did it say?"

"The lieutenant has it," said Joe. "We couldn't read what it said because none of us could read German."

Harold was fumbling in his pocket for the little roll of oiled paper, and presently produced it. He handed it to his brother.

"You can't translate German," he said.

"No, but Hugh can," said Bob. He glanced curiously at the message, and then gave it to Hugh. Every one present watched him intently as he examined it.

"Can you make it out?" asked Harold at length.

"It's pretty small type," said Hugh, perusing it carefully. "I guess I can read it though."

" 'Main American attack will be between forest and river,' " he read. " 'One division will

be west of forest. This attack on west is only feint. Two divisions are in reserve to follow up main attack if successful.' "

"Any signature?" asked Harold.

"None."

"Well, that's the straight dope anyway," said Harold. "At least I heard the same story. How do you suppose they got the information?"

"I wish we knew," said Arthur grimly.

"Have you any idea where the messages are sent from?" Bob inquired. "That's the thing to find out."

"Of course it is," exclaimed Harold with a short laugh. "If we only knew that we could soon stop it."

"Say, Hugh," cried Bob. "Wouldn't it be great if we could spot the man who's doing this?"

"I don't see how we can though."

"Nor I. You ought to report this to headquarters, Harold."

"Of course I ought," Harold agreed. "I don't see when I've had a chance to do it, though, do you?"

"You couldn't do it last night very well, I'll admit," said Bob with a smile.

"Maybe you and Hugh will do it on your way back?"

"Are we going back, Hugh?" exclaimed Bob.

"We'd better, I guess."

"All right, but I hate to do it."

"You'd better get started too," said Harold.

"We're going in the other direction in a few minutes."

"Good-by then," said Bob, rising to his feet. He and Hugh shook hands with Harold, and told the three men good-by.

"I wish you'd locate them pigeons," said Arthur.

"Maybe we'll see them start out some day when we're in the air," laughed Bob. "If we do we'll let you know."

"I wish you would," said Arthur earnestly.

The two young aviators were soon on their way towards the rear, and as Sam had discovered a man from their regiment who reported that it was located about a quarter of a mile to the west of them, Harold soon led his three men in that direction. In a short time they were back among their old comrades, and had rejoined their proper company.

Many familiar faces were missing, however, for the fighting of the preceding two days had been bitter in the extreme, and the casualties heavy.

"We're going over in five minutes," one of



Harold's fellow officers, Lieutenant Howard remarked.

"Where's our artillery?" asked Harold.

Lieutenant Howard looked at his wrist watch.

"Listen," he said.

The ground underneath their feet seemed to shiver for an instant, and then the deafening roar of the artillery smote upon their ears. Every field piece and big gun available was firing as rapidly as the shells could be fed into the hungry breeches. It was a short "crash" bombardment directed chiefly against the tangles of barbed wire up ahead. The ground over which the wire was stretched looked as if it were a seething cauldron of flame interspersed with earth and wood and wire all flung into the air in an indiscriminate mass.

And then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The first attacking wave went over. Harold and his men were in the second, or support wave. The Americans had not gone far, however, before they discovered that the artillery had not done its work as thoroughly as might have been hoped. Great stretches of the evil barbed wire remained to block their path.

With the appearance of the Americans the German machine guns posted in the woods on both

sides of the wire started firing. To silence them it was first necessary to get behind them and the only way to do it was to get through the wire entanglements.

"Take cover," ordered Harold, and his men, now consisting of two platoons, scurried for protection into the shell holes on the wrecked portions of trenches.

"Think we can get through there, Lieutenant?" Arthur inquired.

"Don't know," said Harold shortly. "It'll cost a lot of lives."

The Americans had every intention of getting through the wire, however, but the way they went about it was a revelation to nearly every one who was there to see.

A squad of soldiers from an engineer unit came hurrying forward, the men carrying great rolls of plain ordinary chicken wire. Right into the hail of bullets from the German guns they went, and though many dropped, some one was always ready to take their places.

"What's up?" exclaimed Sam. "Gee, those bullets are so thick you can hear them hitting each other."

Arrived at the barbed-wire entanglements the engineers began to unroll their chicken wire; and

they unrolled it right over the top of the German wire. Just as if there were a lot of barbed-wire fences all close together and the chicken wire was stretched across the tops of them.

“Well, I’ll be gol darned,” exclaimed Joe, for as he watched he saw the American infantry dart forward and using the chicken wire as bridges walk right over the top of the German wire.

A number of these strange roads were laid across the top of the barbed wire, and down every lane went the Americans, the engineers leading and unwinding their rolls of wire net in front of them as they went. It was an amazing, and an awful sight. The German machine guns hidden in the woods concentrated their fire on these aerial pathways and took a heavy toll of the travelers.

The barbed wire on both sides of the narrow strips was festooned with the bodies of young Americans, draped grotesquely in all conceivable positions on the sharp metal points. But no one hesitated.

“They’re through,” shouted Joe excitedly as the first Americans reached the opposite side of the wire entanglements. “They’ll get ’em now, all right.”

The Americans began to yell, and the fact that some of the men had passed over the obstacles,

and lived through the hail of bullets spurred on their comrades. In larger numbers, and with increasing speed they hurried ahead. The popping of hand grenades in the nearby woods bore witness that the enemy machine guns were being given proper attention.

"When are we going over, Lieutenant?" asked Arthur anxiously.

"Can't say," said Harold. "Soon, I hope."

"I want to get into it," said Arthur earnestly.

"And so do I," echoed Joe.

"Well, here's our chance," exclaimed Harold, as the shrill blast of a whistle came to their ears. He stood up. "Forward, in open order; not too fast now. March!"

## CHAPTER XI

### KAMERAD

**H**AROLD dashed forward at the head of his platoon. The German machine-gun crews in the woods were surrendering or being killed, and the fire was slackening. American soldiers seemed to spring out of the ground, and hurrying from all directions they surged ahead. Straight over the barbed wire they went.

Men fell out of the lines, knocked over by the enemy bullets, some going down with a groan and others with that dull, sickening grunt which said so plainly that the war was over for them. But no one hesitated. The medical corps would look after the dead and the wounded; those left alive had other work to do.

Once over the wire the Americans found themselves in a valley, shaped like a bowl and narrowing down at the far end into a narrow gulch. To get through this gulch was their objective. In the gulch were posted more German machine gunners, and a withering fire from their weapons

greeted the oncoming Americans. But the Yankees did not slacken their pace. Instead they began to run, and the hotter the fire the faster they ran. Their Browning automatic rifles swept the positions occupied by the enemy, and many a German went down. Those left alive stuck to their guns, however, and poured lead into the American ranks as fast as they could work their guns.

The ground was strewn with the dead and dying, and the wounded. Harold tripped over the body of a man in his company and fell heavily on his face. The force of his fall stunned him momentarily, and before he had a chance to rise Joe and Arthur were at his side, white with fear; not fear for their own safety, but that of their beloved lieutenant.

"Lieutenant Cook," cried Joe in alarm.

Harold immediately opened his eyes, and tried to struggle to his feet. "Forward," he shouted deliriously.

"Where are you hit?" begged Arthur.

Harold looked at him queerly for a moment as if he did not understand. He passed his hand across his brow, and then a sane look came into his eyes once more.

"I'm not hit," he said. "I tripped and fell."

They started on again. They were some dis-



tance behind the first line of attackers now, and they made extra efforts to catch up. The Americans dashed straight up to the nozzle of the machine guns, and it seemed a miracle that any one should live to get that far.

The Germans stuck to their posts, at least they stuck until the Americans were only about ten feet distant. Then seeing that it was hopeless to continue firing any longer they threw up their hands eagerly, and shouted "Kamerad, Kamerad."

Scores of Americans had fallen. That the Germans who had killed them should themselves get off unscathed was too much for the American doughboys. With yells of rage they sprang at the Germans, bayonets flashed, the Germans squealing with fear, and crying loudly for mercy. But the Yankee infantry men had had no mercy shown them, and they did not propose to show any on their own part.

"Let 'em go at it," snapped Harold's company commander, Captain Bray, his eyes flashing. "They needn't think they can slaughter my boys, and then surrender to us and have us feed 'em."

Some of the Germans tried to defend themselves when they saw the Americans did not propose to take any prisoners. But the Yankees were fight-

ing mad, and with clubbed rifles or bayonets they went at the Boches like demons. The place was a slaughter house. But most of the Germans, and it is typical of the race, screamed with fear and begged weakly for mercy. These the Americans disposed of as though they were so many hogs ready for market.

"It's sickening," muttered Harold, who was standing near Captain Bray.

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed the captain. "Did you ever see a German show any one else any mercy? When they're winning they're the most brutal beasts alive; when they're getting licked they're the worst cowards. The bummiest sports in the world! They can't put over any of their tricks on Americans."

A few minutes later every German machine gunner was dead. The American soldiers did not exult; they were not bloodthirsty, but they were grimly in earnest. The memory of the *Lusitania* was strong in their minds; they had seen the handiwork of the Hun in devastated France; they had seen with their own eyes children with their hands cut off, old men and women made homeless, their houses looted and wrecked, and they had decided that these men who were responsible for the crimes should pay the penalty. And no one

was to blame except the Germans themselves.

An orderly came up and handed a slip of paper to Captain Bray. The captain read it quickly, and then turned to Harold.

“You will push on with B company,” he said.  
“Clear the crest of that hill on the left.”

That was all, but a world of meaning was conveyed in those few words. Harold knew what it meant to fight one's way up the slope of a hill with the enemy above. But he had his instructions and nothing remained but to carry them out to the best of his ability.

## CHAPTER XII

### IN THE WOODS

A FEW moments later Harold had organized his expedition and was proceeding through the woods in the direction of his objective. The hill itself was covered with a dense forest growth which made his task doubly difficult, for it was not possible to see any great distance ahead. The crest had suffered to some extent from the effects of the artillery fire of both armies, but unlike most of the hills near Verdun there were many trees still standing.

The undergrowth on the slopes, however, was unbelievably thick. Harold and his band were practically forced to cut their way through it. Now and again an enemy machine-gun nest held them up. Not for long, however. In one place they found four German machine guns posted in one tree, gun crews and all. Platforms had been built among the branches, and from these high positions the Boches commanded the approach to the

only piece of ground over which it was feasible for the Americans to advance.

Harold's scouts, sent on ahead, reported this condition to him. He at once called a halt. Four squads armed with automatic rifles, were selected and the men ordered to surround the tree and silence the German machine guns.

They set out immediately, sixteen men going to the left and sixteen to the right. Their plan was to surround the tree on four sides and shoot down the Germans if possible.

"This is regular Indian fighting," Joe remarked to Arthur as they stole forward. The two friends were members of one of the squads.

"Good stuff too," exclaimed Arthur. "This kind of fighting gives a man a chance to use his head."

"That's where you're at a disadvantage," growled Sergeant Connors, who was in command of their detachment. "If you don't make less noise you won't have any head."

Arthur was sufficiently squelched by this bit of sarcasm, and the two friends lapsed into silence. Harold in command of the main body was waiting until the expedition he had sent out should fulfill its mission.

Sergeant Connors stalked his prey carefully.

He knew the location of the tree and he laid his course in a wide circle around it. Presently he called a halt.

"It's about a hundred yards ahead there," he said. "Spread out now, and close in on it slowly. Be sure you get the Heinies, and don't let 'em see you if you can help it."

The party advanced cautiously, leaving one of its members posted every few yards, until all sixteen were spread out in a semi-circle around the big tree where the German machine guns were located. The other two squads made up the other half of the circle. It was very quiet in the woods. The noise of distant firing could be heard, but where the little band of Americans were operating there was no sound of warfare. Evidently the Germans had not noted their approach as yet.

Arthur looked at Joe who was stationed behind a tree some ten yards distant from the spot where he was posted.

"I'm going closer," he announced.

"All right," Joe agreed. "I'm with you."

The two soldiers dropped on their hands and knees and began to crawl forward. Their rifles were slung across their backs. They progressed slowly, endeavoring to make as little noise as pos-



sible, and to keep hidden from the sight of the Germans in the tree.

They had gone fifty or sixty feet when there was a sudden rattle of machine-gun fire, and bullets zipped through the underbrush nearby. Joe and Arthur instantly sought shelter behind the protecting trunks of two nearby trees.

"I guess they spotted us," said Joe with a grin.

"I guess they did," Arthur agreed. "The worst of it is they know where we are and the first one to show his head gets a bullet through it."

The noise of the first shots had scarcely died away, however, when a general fusillade began. The Americans scattered through the woods, at once opened fire with their automatic rifles, and the Germans returned their shots with interest. Joe and Arthur both remained flattened against the tree trunks, however, afraid to move, and therefore unable to take any active part in the fight.

"Joe," called Arthur finally.

"Yeah," responded Joe.

"Don't you think the Heinies have got something besides us to think about now?"

"Sounds so," said Joe. "You thinking about moving?"

"I am," said Arthur.

"I got you," said Joe, but as he spoke a shower of machine-gun bullets clipped the bark off the tree he was standing against. "Aha," he exclaimed, hugging the tree trunk closer. "They haven't entirely forgot us yet."

Arthur, however, did not hesitate. He bent low to the ground and scuttled for a nearby tree, one much larger than that which had afforded him protection so far, and one with numerous low-hanging branches. A moment later he swung himself off the ground and was climbing upwards, keeping the trunk between him and the Germans.

"Come on up," he called to Joe when he was about twenty feet off the ground. Then he peered cautiously around the trunk for a glimpse of the enemy.

Joe responded to the invitation at once, and reached the tree where Arthur was posted without even being fired at. The Americans were keeping the Germans extremely busy.

Arthur climbed a bit higher, and ensconced himself in a crotch formed by the meeting of one of the branches with the trunk.

"A couple of those branches are pretty dead," he called down to Joe. "You better look out for 'em."

"I will," said Joe. He took up his position a few feet below his companion.

"I see 'em," exclaimed Arthur after a cautious glance around the tree trunk. "Here's where we take some Heinies off their perch."

"Be careful not to fall yourself," warned Joe.

Arthur began to fire. At his first shot he saw one of the Germans topple off his platform and crashing downwards through the branches of the big tree, strike the ground with a heavy thud. But all the Americans were firing now, and he could not tell whether it was his shot which had taken effect or not.

"There's one of 'em gone," he cried excitedly.

"I can't see 'em," said Joe.

"Look where my gun's pointing," Arthur directed, and sent another volley at the German machine gunners.

"Do you see 'em now?" he inquired.

"All right," said Joe. "Here goes."

He joined in the firing. The tree where the Germans were posted was riddled with bullets. Branches, bark, and leaves fell from it in a steady shower, while now and again the body of a gray-clad soldier went crashing down to join its fellows on the ground below. One German's coat caught on a broken branch as it fell, and the body hung

there swinging grotesquely for a few moments until a bullet cut it down.

Two of the guns had been silenced. Whether any Americans had been killed or not was something unknown to the two friends in the tree. But they were untouched as yet, and kept on firing as rapidly as they could load their guns.

“Look at that crazy man,” exclaimed Arthur suddenly. “Who is it?”

“Farrel, I think,” said Joe. “What does he think he’s doing?”

An American doughboy had suddenly appeared in the small open space surrounding the tree where the Germans were. He ran at top speed until he was directly under the tree itself. Then raising his rifle he began to fire at the Germans from below.

“He’s a nut,” exclaimed Arthur, ceasing to fire as he watched the strange performance. “They’ll get him sure.”

“Maybe he thinks they can’t point their guns straight down,” said Joe.

“How about hand grenades though?”

Arthur had scarcely uttered these words when one of the Germans in the tree dropped a hand grenade. It exploded with a deafening noise not five feet away from the brave but foolhardy sol-

dier and he went down to fight no more.

“Gosh,” exclaimed Arthur. “He ought to have known that.”

The Americans had slackened their fire for the brief time that Farrel had occupied the center of the stage, but now they renewed it with increased vigor. Only one of the enemy machine guns now remained in action.

“They’re pretty nearly done,” said Joe. “I’ll be awful glad too for this branch is what I call gol darned uncomfortable.”

He started to shift his position when there was a loud crack. The branch on which he was seated gave way, and Joe lost his balance. He clutched wildly at the tree trunk and other branches to save himself, but it was no use. The crack was succeeded by the sound of ripping, splitting wood and a moment later Joe was falling earthwards, scratching his face and arms, and tearing his uniform in numerous places on the way down.

Arthur, at the first sound of the commotion below, had immediately ceased firing and turned around to see what was taking place. When he discovered the cause of all the commotion he became so excited that he too lost his balance and a moment later was tumbling down through the branches after Joe.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ON THE CREST

**J**OE naturally was the first to reach the ground and for a moment he lay there too stunned to move. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when Arthur an instant later alighted, or perhaps it would be more proper to say "lit with a terrible bump" close beside him.

"Arthur," he exclaimed, "is that you?"

"Who did you think it was?" demanded Arthur, rubbing his head ruefully. "Some kind of a bird?"

"What happened anyway?" inquired Joe.

"You fell out of the tree," said Arthur, rising to his feet and feeling himself all over very gingerly.

"Where did you come from though?" inquired Joe who was apparently slightly out of his head as a result of his fall.

"I didn't want to be left alone," said Arthur. "You deserted me, but I had decided that I was not going to get shook as easily as all that, so I came along too."



“Quit your kidding,” exclaimed Joe, getting uncertainly to his feet.

“Say,” he cried suddenly. “We’ve got a terrible lot of nerve standing around here like this for the Heinies to shoot at us.”

The two soldiers immediately threw themselves flat on the ground wondering how it had happened that they had not been seen by the Germans and been shot the moment they had exposed themselves. But they did not hear the sound of a single gun. They could make out voices talking in the distance, but there was no noise of firing.

“What’s happened?” exclaimed Arthur in surprise. “Do you suppose we have been dreaming?”

“This cut on my face is no dream, that’s sure,” said Joe.

“What’s going on then?” insisted Arthur, rising cautiously to his feet once more.

“I guess they got all the Heinies out of the tree; that’s all that’s happened,” said Joe.

“Let’s go see anyway,” said Arthur, glancing in the direction of the tree the Germans had occupied.

The two friends were pretty well battered as a result of their fall from the tree. This may easily be imagined, however, and the wonder of it is

that neither had suffered any broken bones. Soldiers in strict training are usually pretty hard physically, however, and it is surprising how much it takes to disable one of them. Joe and Arthur were pretty well bruised and scratched, of course, but as they hurried along they soon forgot about that part of their recent experience in their anxiety to learn the result of the encounter with the Germans in the tree.

The four squads of American soldiers were gathered around the foot of the tree. Farrel, who had paid so dearly for his reckless daring, had been covered by an overcoat belonging to one of his comrades, and a messenger dispatched for stretcher-bearers to carry his poor mangled body back where it could be given a decent burial.

“What hit you two?” demanded one of the men as Joe and Arthur came up to the spot where the rest of the party were standing.

“No German hit us, you can bet on that,” responded Joe. “What’s the matter with us anyway?”

“Oh, nothing except that you look as if a tank had run over you,” said the man with a grin.

Joe looked at Arthur and Arthur looked at Joe. Neither one of them had really realized how badly

the other did look, for they had had other things to think about. Now, however, they both took the time to examine the other, and what they saw was surprising to say the least. Their faces were cut, their clothes were torn, and they were covered with dirt scraped off the tree, and accumulated as they rolled about on the ground.

“Gosh,” exclaimed Arthur, “if I look as bad as you I must be something awful.”

“You’re ten times worse than I am,” said Joe stoutly. “No one could possibly look the way you do and still live.”

This duel of words was soon interrupted by an order from Sergeant Connors, however, and the little band made preparations to return whence they had come.

A few moments later the little band was returning through the woods to the spot where the main body of Americans was located. Casualties had been surprisingly few; Farrel had been killed and two men were wounded rather severely, but otherwise every one was in good shape, even Joe and Arthur, who were fast forgetting their bruises.

It was not long before they came in sight of their comrades, and they received a warm welcome. Harold was greatly pleased that their ex-

plot had turned out so well, and took special pains to compliment Sergeant Connors.

He gave directions that Farrel's body should be taken to the rear, and then led his company forward. It was difficult ground to walk over, and progress was necessarily slow. No signs of the enemy were encountered, however, and it was not long before the scouts reported that the crest of the hill was just ahead.

Harold at once called a halt, and with a picked squad of men went on ahead to reconnoiter. The rest of the company remained in the woods on the slope to await developments. Nor did they have long to wait. When only a few moments had elapsed Harold returned with the report that a large body of the enemy was stationed on the crest of the hill. He had been given orders to clear the crest, so there was nothing to do but lay his plans accordingly.

The company was divided into two parts. One half was to work around to the eastward as far as possible and make a feint at attacking the Germans from that direction. The main attack, however, was to be from the other side, and it was hoped the enemy would be distracted and partially off his guard. Harold remained in command of

the party which was to make the main attack, and Sergeant Connors was delegated to lead the others.

“Remember now, Sergeant,” said Harold, “don’t try to go too fast. The Germans aren’t going to run away from you.”

“I’ll remember, sir,” said Sergeant Connors, saluting.

He started off through the woods, leaving the others to wait until they should hear the sound of firing. And it was hard work waiting, and nervous work too. It was strangely silent in the woods, and silence is sometimes harder to endure than noise. Every man knew that only a short distance away the enemy was waiting. What that meant every one of them fully realized,—wounds and suffering, maybe, possibly death. Nor is there any man who ever lived and fought in a war who was not afraid before an attack.

The minutes slipped by, and the men waited, every nerve tense. There were a few whispered conversations, but as a rule silence prevailed.

Suddenly the sharp crack of a hand grenade was heard, followed an instant later by a fusillade of rifle shots. Then the sound of shouting came to the ears of the waiting men. It was time for

them to be starting along and they looked at their young lieutenant, expecting orders. The orders came almost immediately.

“Forward,” said Harold. “Keep well spread out and follow me.”

They started towards the top of the hill, the men keenly alert and with much of their nervousness gone now that they were on their way.

Harold kept some ten paces in front of his men. Cautiously he led the way up the slope. The sound of the fighting to the eastward had not diminished the slightest bit and Harold breathed a hope that the Germans would not be aware of their approach until they had almost reached their objective.

But this hope was not to be realized. There was the sudden crack of a rifle in front of him, followed by a burst of machine-gun fire.

“Rush ‘em,” shouted Harold at the top of his voice. “Charge.”

The men needed no second invitation. With a yell that could have been heard a half a mile away they started for the Germans intrenched on the hilltop. Machine-gun bullets sang about their heads, but they stopped for nothing. The German positions on the crest were lightly held, for Harold’s strategy in sending a part of his force



around to the eastward had been entirely successful, and the enemy had not been prepared for an attack from this other quarter. This does not mean that the Americans took the positions without a desperate struggle, however.

A big German non-commissioned officer sprang out of the trench just as Harold approached and whipping out an automatic pistol, stuck it squarely in his face, and pulled the trigger.

Joe, who was just in back of his young lieutenant, was weak in the knees with terror. He was certain his beloved commander was going to be killed right before his eyes. Some god of luck was with the young American, however, for the revolver did not go off. Either it was not loaded or had missed fire. But neither Harold nor Joe waited to find out the cause of the fortunate occurrence. There was the flash of steel, the dull sound of one body striking another and down went the German with Harold on top of him. Joe's bayonet had pierced the German through the stomach, and at the same instant Harold had seized him by the throat.

Joe leaned down and assisted the young lieutenant to his feet, not sure what had happened to him.

"I'm all right," said Harold quickly.



He pointed his revolver at another German who was staring towards them, and fired. The German went down without a sound. The fighting was furious now and increasing in intensity all the time. The Americans fought like fiends. Bayonets, hand grenades, clubbed rifles, bare hands, and knives were the weapons employed and little by little the Germans gave ground.

Joe was a regular demon. He seemed to be everywhere at the same time, and at his side always was Arthur. They would jump down into the trench after a German or pursue another across the open field on the hilltop,—no matter what the enemy did or where he went the two Americans were after him as relentlessly as two avenging Fates.

The American attack was too much for the Germans and it was not long before they had had enough.

“Kamerad,” they shouted, or tried to run away.

Not many escaped, however. The Yankees’ fighting blood was aroused; they knew they were better than their opponents, and the battle was going their way. They did not want to quit.

Harold ordered them to desist, however, and to consolidate the positions they had captured. He called back those men who were pressing on in

pursuit of the fleeing Germans. His orders were to clear the crest of the hill; this had been done, and he had no further instructions. Moreover, it was necessary to take precautions against the enemy counter-attack which was almost certain to come. He knew that this hill position was entirely too valuable to be given up without more of a struggle than that which had gone before.

He gave orders for improving the trenches they had just taken, and then dispatched a messenger to find out what had become of the half of his company which had been sent to make the fake attack.

Before the man had a chance to carry out his mission, however, a soldier from the other detachment arrived with a message for him. He tore open the envelope the man handed to him, and read as follows: "Strong forces of the enemy approaching from the westward. We are practically surrounded. What shall we do?"

The name signed to the message was "Connors."

Harold hesitated only for a moment. The plight of both detachments was plainly desperate, and something had to be done at once. He soon made up his mind.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CUT OFF

**H**AROLD immediately ordered the men to stop work on the captured German positions, and lined them up.

“Now,” he said to the messenger, “lead the way.”

They started in the direction of Sergeant Connors’ detachment. They were not molested on the way, nor did they see any signs of the enemy. Apparently the Germans had been entirely cleared from the crest, and both detachments of Harold’s company had done their work well.

“What’s up, Sergeant?” said Harold when they had joined forces.

“We fixed ’em here all right, sir,” said Connors, “but one of my men reported about fifteen minutes ago that a whole regiment of the Boches was in back of us.”

“They’re in front, that’s sure,” exclaimed Harold.

He stopped speaking for a moment, and knitted his brows as he thought the matter over.

“Send out reconnoitering parties on all four sides,” he ordered presently. “Meanwhile we’ll move into the woods where we won’t be quite so conspicuous.”

Scouting parties were at once sent out, while the remainder of the company made their way into the forest. Some of the men were wounded, all of them were dog tired, but no one’s spirits were low. They all realized that to be cut off, and surrounded, with only iron rations in their packs was a serious matter; they also understood that it might mean they would never escape. But they swapped grim jokes, and managed to smile once in a while.

“How did it happen, Joe?” Arthur inquired.

“Search me,” said Joe. “All I know is the Heinies are all around us, and our goose is probably cooked.”

“You don’t seem very gloomy about it.”

“Why should I? I’ve killed my share of Heinies, and if they get me it isn’t much more than fair.”

“Do you suppose we’ll all get captured?”

“I know one that won’t,” said Joe with a snap of his square jaw.

“And I can guess another,” Arthur exclaimed eagerly.

The forest was very dense, and it was necessary in many places to cut a path through the underbrush. Progress was slow. For one reason, because the going was so difficult, and also because it was not known how far away the Germans were stationed.

Moreover, the day was drawing to a close, and darkness was creeping into the forest. And it was not long before it had its effect on the men. They lapsed into silence, proceeding stealthily, every sense alert.

A machine gun opened fire on them from the left, and one man was killed, and another shot through the arm before a bombing party could silence it. Then the scouts sent on ahead returned to report that the enemy was posted in force in a ravine a short distance away. There was nothing to do but call a halt.

Harold posted sentries, and directed the men to bivouac in a dense thicket, covering perhaps a hundred square yards of ground. No fires were lighted, and little supper was eaten, because there was only a pitifully small supply of rations available.

"They haven't got us yet, Joe," said Harold, stopping for a moment as he made his rounds looking after the welfare of the men.

"No, sir, not by a blame sight," responded Joe heartily.

"And they never will get us alive," he added to Arthur a moment later when the young officer had passed on.

"I guess our time has come though," said Sam.

"It has if you think so, that's sure," exclaimed Arthur warmly. "Don't give up."

"I'm going to fight to the end all right," said Sam laconically. "I think the end is coming, that's all."

"The end of some Heinies," snapped Joe.

The four scouting parties returned to report that they had encountered large forces of the enemy on all sides. There apparently was no question that the plucky company was entirely surrounded. Nor was there any use in trying to cut their way through to safety.

"We got ahead of the bunch, that's all," said Joe. "I heard heavy firing to the southwest this afternoon which probably means that the Heinies counter-attacked and cut in behind us when we started up that gol darned hill."

"And drove our men back," said Sam.

"Yes, but not for long I'll bet," exclaimed Arthur stoutly. "All we've got to do is sit tight here, and we'll get rescued."

"Maybe," said Sam.

"'Maybe,' nothing," exclaimed Arthur. "They'll probably get to us to-morrow morning."

"They haven't forgot us, that's sure," said Joe.

"Maybe they have," said Sam.

"Look here, Unk," cried Arthur almost at the limit of his patience. "If I didn't know you was a good fighter and a good American too, I'd almost think you was a pro-German."

"I just can't understand how all these things can keep happening to us, and we get out all right," said Sam soberly. "I guess you can't figger me out. Sometimes I can't myself."

"Aw, you're just a natural born gloom," said Joe. "You'd be all right if you'd only stop thinking about yourself."

"That isn't it," said Sam. "I ain't scared of getting killed. You know that. I just think I'm going to be, that's all."

If the truth were known Joe and Arthur were not so sure that Sam was wrong. Certainly their plight was a desperate one. They knew that Harold would never surrender. They knew that none of his men would want him to surrender. The answer was that the Americans would sell their lives as dearly as possible, but the chances were all in



favor of their being killed or starved to death sooner or later.

The three soldiers grew silent as they pondered their predicament. It was growing dark constantly. Darkness in the woods is far more intense than it is outside too. The trees and their foliage shut out all the light of the stars and the moon; the shadows seem blacker, and there is not even a ray of light to relieve the ink-like gloom of the night.

"Gosh," said Arthur. "It's spooky."

"Spooky," echoed Joe. "I should say it was."

"And the Heinies will start something before long in my opinion," said Sam. "We're in for it, I believe."

"Let 'em come," exclaimed Joe. "They'll get all they're looking for."

"Me for a little snooze before they come," said Arthur. "I'm going to catch a bit of sleep."

"I can't sleep and I don't mind saying so," said Sam. "The whole thing makes me nervous."

"You expect to get killed anyway, don't you?" inquired Joe, giving Arthur a nudge.

"Sure," said Sam, "but that don't worry me. I almost wish I could get killed sometimes and have it over with. It's this waiting round for it to happen that gets on my nerves."

"I know how you feel all right," said Arthur. "I sometimes feel the same way myself. It gets a fellow's goat after a while. I wish myself the Heinies would attack and put an end to this awful suspense."

He had scarcely uttered these words when one of the sentries challenged sharply, his challenge being followed almost immediately by a volley of rifle shots and the bursting of a quantity of hand grenades. Shouts and cries filled the air, the voices of the Americans mingling with the guttural exclamations of the Germans. Orders were given, the men hastening to carry them out as best they could in the inky darkness.

"Stick close, Art," exclaimed Joe. "We don't want to get separated in this mess, you know."

"Leave it to me," cried Arthur. "I'll stick all right."

It was hard to tell which was friend and which was foe in the darkness. All that could be seen were great black shapes, every one of them grotesque in appearance, and seeming much larger than was really the case. It was all more or less hit or miss, and trust to luck that you were not trying to kill one of your own men.

Harold ran about among his men, giving an order here, stopping to direct a squad there, and

by his presence lend encouragement to the members of the company.

A big German loomed up out of the night, and came at Joe with a rush. Joe saw him coming, and merely stepped to one side, and as the German was going too fast to stop at once he could not check his rush in time to escape the bayonet which was waiting for him on the end of Joe's rifle. Setting his feet firmly on the ground Joe drew back his gun and then lunged forward with all of his strength behind his thrust. Perhaps the German had not seen him; he may have mistaken him for one of his own men. At any rate he fairly impaled himself on the end of Joe's bayonet.

The shock of the impact almost wrenched the rifle out of Joe's hand, and for a moment he feared that the steel blade had been broken. He was swung off his balance, and the rifle was torn from his grasp. Then to make matters worse he tripped over the prostrate body of the fallen German, and was himself pitched headlong to the ground.

Arthur bent over him anxiously.

"Are you hurt, Joe?" he demanded eagerly.

Joe got to his feet. "No," he growled, "but I'm scared I busted my gol darned bayonet."

He had little time given him to worry about

that, however. As he leaned over to try and extricate his bayonet from the body of the dead German another of the enemy rushed at him from the rear and seized him by the throat. The two men went down, rolling over and over among the bushes and underbrush which grew all about.

Arthur danced around them, unable to see which was which, and for that reason powerless to render the slightest assistance to his comrade.

Neither one of the two men wrestling there on the ground in the French forest uttered a sound. The German had Joe in a grip of steel. The big American felt as if his eyes were going to pop out of his head. He felt sick at his stomach and he could scarcely breathe. He seized the German's wrists in his two hands, striving to break the grip, which was sapping every bit of strength out of his body. But he seemed powerless.

The rattle of the machine guns began to sound farther and farther away. He wondered if this was to be the end for him. Strangely enough he did not seem to mind very much. Still he wondered rather vaguely why it was that Arthur or Sam or somebody did not come to his assistance. Could it be that they had forsaken him? Maybe they had been killed.

Then Joe suddenly decided that he was not

going to be killed after all. With this new determination seemed to come new strength. Putting every ounce of power he possessed into the effort he made one final attempt to throw off that grip which was sapping the life out of his body. And he tried new tactics. He relaxed his hold on the German's wrists; then doubling up his arms he drove his elbows into his enemy's ribs.

The jar loosened the German's hold on his throat the least bit and Joe, revived by the breath of air he was enabled to draw into his lungs, was not slow to press the advantage gained thereby. Once again he hammered his elbows into the German's ribs. The German uttered a hoarse grunt and Arthur, standing close by, was thus enabled to identify the enemy. Quick as a flash he threw himself on top of the big German and began to rain blow after blow on his face.

Under this treatment the German did not last long. He loosed his hold on Joe's throat, and tried to defend himself against this new antagonist. But Arthur never ceased his hammering for one moment. It was too close quarters to use his bayonet, but his knuckles were like iron, and it was not long before the familiar cry of "Kamerad" came from the German.

Arthur hit him once more for good luck, and

went to work in a business-like way to tie up his prisoner so he could be sure of his causing no further trouble. He removed the German's belt and tied it tight around his arms. Then he took away his weapons.

Joe meanwhile was lying on the ground nearby, not making any effort to move, while his breath rattled in his bruised and swollen throat. Arthur's next care was Joe.

At that moment, however, two figures loomed out of the night. They were running and the three figures on the ground were directly in their path. Before Arthur had a chance to save himself or get Joe out of the way they had tripped over them and went sprawling headlong to the earth.

## CHAPTER XV

### SURROUNDED

**A**RTHUR lay still, not knowing whether the men who had tripped over them were friends or foes. Then he decided that at all events he must be prepared to defend himself and Joe to the best of his ability, and he sprang to his feet, rifle in hand. No sound came from the men who had fallen over them.

This circumstance puzzled him, and he was at a loss to account for it. He crept forward silently towards the spot where he had seen the two figures disappear in the darkness. He thought he saw something move and he challenged.

“Who’s there?” he cried.

“Say, Buddy,” exclaimed a voice in which relief was plainly marked. “We thought you was a Hun.”

“Gosh,” said Arthur, “I thought you was too.”

“I guess they’ve gone,” said the first speaker. “They messed us up pretty bad, though, I’m afraid.”



"They nearly got my pal," said Arthur, "but I got the Heinie who tried it all right."

"Is he dead?" inquired the other.

"No," said Arthur, "but he's fixed so he can't do any more harm."

The fighting had ceased, except for the occasional rattle of a machine gun, a German machine gun, for the Americans were short of ammunition and did not dare use what they had unless it was absolutely necessary.

Arthur and the other two Americans returned to the spot where Joe was lying beside the captured German. Joe apparently had not moved. Neither had the German.

"Joe," called Arthur.

There was no answer.

"Joe," Arthur called again.

"Yeah," said a weak voice. "What do ya want?"

"Are you all right?" inquired Arthur anxiously.

"Where's that Heinie?" demanded Joe.

Arthur gave a black patch of shadow lying on the ground nearby a gentle kick.

"Kamerad!" exclaimed a frightened voice eagerly.

"He's right here," said Arthur with a chuckle.

“You needn’t worry about him any more.”

“Got him tied up?” Joe inquired.

“Safe and sound,” said Arthur readily.

“He almost got me,” said Joe ruefully. “My throat feels as if it had been sandpapered and then put through a sausage machine.”

“You’re lucky to get off as easy as that,” exclaimed one of the soldiers who had come back with Arthur. “A lot of our boys won’t never have to worry about sore throats no more. The Heinies got a bunch of them.”

It was out of the question to have a light, and consequently impossible to give the attention to the wounded men that they really needed. There was no dressing station at hand, and bandages applied as best they could be in the darkness had to do the suffering men until daylight should come and afford their comrades a chance to help them further.

“What are you going to do with your prisoner?” inquired one of the two soldiers Arthur had met in the darkness.

“Keep him here till morning and turn him over to the lieutenant, I guess,” said Arthur. “I don’t know what else I can do with him, do you?”

Harold arrived on the scene at that moment, however.

"What have you got here?" he inquired.  
"Any one hurt?"

"Joe's a little bunged up, sir," said Arthur, answering the second question first. "We've got a prisoner here too."

"Hope you're not hurt badly, Joe," said Harold. "Is your prisoner wounded?"

"I guess his face is a bit sore, sir," said Arthur grimly. "Nothing serious though, I'm sort of sorry to say."

"Can he talk?" asked Harold.

"I think so, sir," said Arthur, "though all he's said so far has been, 'Kamerad.' "

"Good," exclaimed Harold. "Bring him along with me, will you?"

"Come on, you," ordered Arthur, digging his toe into the back of the prostrate German. Whether the prisoner understood English or not he seemed to catch on readily enough what was wanted of him, and he made an effort to get to his feet. It was a difficult thing to do, however, with his arms tied, and Arthur found it necessary to lend him a hand.

A moment later, however, Harold, Arthur, and their prisoner were making their way along through the darkness, Harold in the lead.

There was a little ravine or rather gully in the

center of the ground occupied by the Americans, and towards this spot Harold led the way. It was deep, almost like a cave, and for this reason it was possible to have a light.

Sergeant Connors and another prisoner were the occupants of the place when the three others arrived.

"A second one, eh?" exclaimed Sergeant Connors, catching sight of the German Arthur had brought in.

"Yes," said Harold. "One that Arthur picked up."

"Good," exclaimed the sergeant. "Now we can tell whether this first fellow is telling the truth or not."

"Where's Schmidt?" inquired Harold. "We need him to do the interpreting for us."

"Right outside, sir," said Connors. "I'll fetch him in."

Heinrich Schmidt, a German-American, was soon summoned. He had been born in Germany, and had lived there until he was sixteen years old, but he had no use for anything German. Maybe having lived there so long he had had too much of it.

"Ask him what unit he belongs to," Harold directed.

Schmidt complied and interrogated the prisoner as Harold instructed him.

Much information of value was obtained. For one thing it was learned that three German regiments were facing the Americans; three regiments against one company. This corroborated the story the other prisoner had told.

It was also learned that the Germans had orders to take every American in the company dead or alive. They intended to make an example of them for the benefit of all the other American units. Moreover the Germans expected the Americans would be forced to surrender soon on account of lack of food, though the prisoner admitted that his officers were somewhat nervous lest aid should reach the beleaguered company before they were forced to such an extremity. This explained the attack that evening, and the prisoner said that these attacks were to be kept up, and no rest given to the surrounded Americans.

"I guess he's telling the truth," said Harold. "That's the same story the other man told."

"Looks as if we were in for it, sir," said Connors soberly. "Our supply of food can't possibly last more than one day more."

"I know it," Harold agreed. "It's bad business."

"All right, Arthur," he said. "You better go along now and see if there is anything you can do for Joe. Glad you picked up this prisoner."

Arthur saluted and withdrew, picking his way along carefully in the darkness. He was challenged several times, because there was no telling but that one of the enemy might steal into the American lines in the darkness. But finally he arrived back at the spot where he had left Joe and found his friend sitting up still rubbing his throat.

"How's it feeling, Joe?" he asked.

"Rotten," said Joe shortly. "Where's the Heinie that did it?"

"Talking to the lieutenant."

"Anything interesting to say?"

"Oh, nothing except that we are surrounded by three regiments of Germans and they have orders to take every one of us dead or alive."

"That's nice," Joe observed laconically.

"Isn't it?" said Arthur. "Let's get a little sleep."

"I'm afraid I can't sleep much with this throat," said Joe. "Still I guess it's the wise thing to do."

They rolled themselves in their blankets and in spite of all they had been through that day, and

the uncertainty of what the morrow held in store for them, it was not long before they were both in the land of dreams.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A DAY OF HORROR

**A**T dawn the Germans attacked on all four sides. Only the grim determination on the part of the Americans that they would defend themselves to the last ditch enabled them to keep their enemies at bay.

Time after time the Germans came on, while from the underbrush and from behind trees the Americans poured a withering fire into their ranks. The enemy dead littered the ground, and the Americans still held out. The failure of their efforts only seemed to make the Germans more determined to attain their object, and with renewed fury they would advance to the attack.

Nor were the Germans the only ones who were suffering casualties. Many a member of the little band of defenders had been killed, and many another had been wounded. The strain was terrific. Fight, fight, fight, and to know that all you have to look forward to is more fighting, with no letup or relief, is a test for the strongest nerves and the stoutest hearts.

The once peaceful woods echoed and reëchoed with the crack of rifles and the rattle of machine guns, the shouts and oaths of the fighting men, and the groans of the wounded and dying. Many a moss-covered patch of forest ground was turned from green to red.

Without water and without sufficient food to keep up their strength the Americans battled on doggedly. Morning changed to afternoon, and darkness began to sift into the forest once more, and still the battle raged; there was no sign of relief for the tired and almost exhausted Americans.

Their numbers had been reduced by one half since they had come into the woods. Not all that number had been killed, to be sure, but easily fifty per cent. had been put out of action for one reason or another.

Joe, Sam, and Arthur had escaped harm so far, and Harold, too, by some lucky chance was still unhurt. Towards late afternoon, during a temporary lull in the fighting Harold called his company together, and put the proposition to them of surrendering.

“We’ve made a good fight of it,” he said, “and I feel that it is for you men to decide whether we are to keep it up any longer.”

He looked at the tired and drawn faces about him and his eyes filled with tears; tears of pride and sorrow for all that his brave followers had endured.

No one seemed to wish to be the first to speak.

“Any one got anything to say?” inquired Harold.

Sam rose to his feet. “For my part I’d like to stick it out,” he said simply. “The Huns have gotten a lot of us and they may get the rest, but it’s cost them something, and I’d like to see them pay a little more.”

A murmur of approbation greeted these words.

“He’s dead right,” exclaimed another soldier, standing up. “I’d much rather be killed than surrender to a lot of dirty Germans. I’ve got a wife home too, but I know she’d say the same thing if she had to decide.”

“What do you other men think?” asked Harold.

“The same thing,” came the reply from a score of throats.

“Is there any one who does not agree to what these men have said?” Harold inquired. “I hope no one will hesitate to say so.”

There was not a word spoken.

“I understand then,” said Harold, “that every one wishes to fight to the end. Am I right?”

“Yes,” exclaimed the whole company as with one voice.

“So be it then,” said Harold, his haggard eyes gleaming with pride. “No one surrenders, not even if he is the last man left alive.”

The little meeting broke up, the men returning to their various posts, only Sam remaining behind.

“Can I speak with you a second, Lieutenant?” he asked.

“You certainly may,” said Harold. “What can I do for you?”

“Well, sir,” said Sam, “there’s a couple of Hun machine-gun nests the other side of that little ridge, and I’d like to go after them.”

Harold looked at the speaker curiously. “Just what do you mean?” he inquired. “Go after them alone?”

“Yes, sir,” said Sam. “I’ve got an automatic rifle, but I need more ammunition.”

“It would probably mean almost certain death to go out there.”

“Yes, sir,” said Sam. “I don’t worry about that though.”

“Those two guns have been getting most of our boys, Lieutenant,” he exclaimed eagerly. “If I

can put them out of business it ought to help a whole lot."

"And you want more ammunition, you say?" asked the young lieutenant.

"Yes, sir."

Harold thought a moment. "All right," he said presently.

A few moments later Sam, armed with his automatic rifle and a large supply of reserve ammunition, crept out of the bushes and began to work his way forward in the direction of the enemy machine guns.

He crawled most of the way. On all fours he made his way along, using every bit of available cover as a protection. Only a few of his comrades knew that he was starting on his perilous mission, but those who did know watched him with undisguised admiration. Among the number were Joe and Arthur.

"Sam's got nerve all right," said Joe warmly.

"I'll say he has," Arthur agreed. "Look at him."

"The last look you'll ever have, I'm afraid," said Joe.

"He must think his time has come," Arthur suggested.

"Poor old Sam," said Joe. "He certainly can

think of more awful things that can happen to a man than any one I ever saw."

"But he never meant half of what he said," protested Arthur.

"That's true enough, I guess," Joe admitted.

Sam moved forward until he was on the side of the little ridge behind which the German machine guns were posted. He crawled forward very carefully until he could peer over the crest, and then he slowly raised his automatic rifle.

"They'll be down on us like a swarm of angry hornets the second he fires the first shot," said Joe. "We might as well get ready."

"And warn the others too," said Arthur.

"Wait a minute," said Joe, laying his hand on his comrade's arm. "What's he doing out there?"

Sam lay perfectly still, apparently greatly interested in something which was taking place on the other side of the ridge. He had lowered his rifle, and seemed to be awaiting developments. What these developments were of course Joe and Arthur had no means of knowing. They watched Sam in almost absolute silence, exchanging a whispered word only now and then.

Suddenly the Germans opened a new attack. A shower of shells tore their way through the

trees to burst among the well-nigh exhausted Americans, quickly followed by the rattle of machine guns and the ear-splitting explosion of hand grenades. The awful agony had to be gone through with once again. The mental suffering was worse than the bodily.

"Poor Sam," exclaimed Joe. "I guess they got him good this time all right."

"Look's so," Arthur agreed, examining his rifle with careful attention. "His time has come for sure."

But they reckoned without their host. The first wave of attacking Germans soon appeared coming over the top of the little ridge. Sam at once sprang to his feet, and with the most reckless disregard for his own safety opened fire on the enemy with his automatic rifle.

The Germans had not expected opposition from this quarter and for a moment they were non-plussed. They faltered and hung back. Sam, as coolly as if he were shooting clay pigeons in a vacant lot at home, poured his fire into the gray-clad ranks of the enemy.

He in turn was the target for their guns, as would naturally be the case. But he seemed to lead a charmed life. He stood on the crest of the ridge in full view of both sides. All the time he



kept his rifle going as fast as he could put the clips into it.

"Gosh," cried Arthur admiringly, "I never saw anything like it in all my life."

"Nor heard of anything like it either," exclaimed Joe.

The German officers were in a rage. They could be seen walking up and down behind their men, urging them on, pleading with them to go forward, and threatening them as they refused. All this could be seen from the American lines and full advantage was taken of the demoralization in the enemy ranks. Demoralization caused practically entirely by the efforts of one man, one lone American.

Four Germans came at Sam from the rear. His comrades shouted a warning at him, and whether he heard it or not he turned in time to see them. Thereupon he deliberately turned his back on the main body of the enemy and directed his fire at the four Germans. He killed them all in almost less time than it takes to tell about it.

"He's a fiend," exclaimed Arthur in an awe-struck voice. "Why he hasn't been killed long ago is a mystery to me."

Sam kept on firing, however. His rifle was so hot he could hardly hold onto it; that this was so

could be seen from the way he kept shifting his grip, but he poured a steady stream of bullets into the wavering ranks of the Germans. In vain the officers exhorted their men; the lone American was too much for them to stand against. They broke and fled back to the positions from which they had started.

A cheer went up from the Americans. Single handed Sam had broken up the German attack. He started to return to his lines. He had gone only a few steps, however, when he stumbled and fell heavily to the ground. He had been wounded after all. A half dozen of his comrades rushed to his assistance. Eager hands lifted him up and bore him in.

A moment later he was laid on the ground while a group of his companions gathered 'round, anxious to learn how badly he was hurt, and every one of them hoping for the best. But it did not take a doctor to tell that Sam's fighting days were over. A bullet had torn away most of his right knee cap, two more had pierced his shoulder, while his shirt was red with blood, and blood ran out of his mouth. Evidently he had been shot through the lungs.

"It's all over," he gasped, choking and coughing.

Harold knelt and took his head in his lap. He was too overcome with emotion to speak.

"I always tried to do my best," said Sam faintly. "I hope I helped some."

"Has any one got a flag?" he asked presently.

One of the men produced a tiny American flag, and handed it to Harold.

"Lift me up," said Sam.

Harold raised his head gently, and in response to Sam's wish held the flag to his lips.

With a supreme effort Sam took the bit of silk in his right hand, crushed it to his bloody mouth, and sank back dead.

Another young American had made the supreme sacrifice that liberty and justice might not perish from the earth.

"I only hope I can do half as well," exclaimed a big raw-boned corporal, the tears streaming down his face.

"Amen," echoed a dozen voices.

The group began to break up, and the men were starting away, when the sound of heavy firing to the westward arrested their attention.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A NIGHT EXPEDITION

“**W**HAT’S doing over there?” exclaimed Arthur.

Joe stood still and listened to the sound of guns, borne to their ears by the west wind.

“A real fight of some sort,” he said. “Personally I’ve had enough for one day.”

“And I too, Joe,” said Arthur. “You know we can’t keep this business up very much longer. The men are just about all in.”

“I know it,” Joe agreed, “and it’s remarkable that they have lasted as long as they have.”

The sound of the firing increased. The noise made by field pieces could be heard, as if a barrage were being laid down.

“Unless I’m crazy,” said one of the men, “I feel sure I hear French seventy-fives.”

The tired soldiers looked at one another, their sunken and haggard eyes lighting up with a gleam of hope that rescue was in sight. But it seemed almost too good to be true.

"Do you suppose it's possible?" cried Arthur eagerly.

"Anything is possible in this war," said the first speaker.

"I don't dare think about it," said another, "because if it wasn't true I'd die of disappointment. I couldn't stand being fooled on a thing like that."

From the looks on the men's faces this remark seemed to express the feelings of every one in the little group. They had suffered so much and so long; they had practically given up hope of ever being rescued and to get their hopes up only to have them shattered seemed more than they could bear. There was a wistful expression on every man's face, as they listened to the noise of the guns.

Nearer and nearer it came. The Germans posted all about the Americans' positions were strangely quiet. Their lack of action may have been due to the fact that Sam's exploit had effectively taken away their enthusiasm for any more fighting at the present time, or perhaps it was because there was something happening over there to the westward that kept them from paying any further attention to the beleaguered little band.

"I believe there's something doing," exclaimed Joe.

"So do I," echoed another of the group. "Just listen to those guns. I never heard guns before that I liked the sound of."

"Are you sure they are seventy-fives?" said Arthur.

"No doubt of it," said Joe confidently. "You can't mistake them to save your life."

"Well, if they're not seventy-fives we won't have any lives to save," exclaimed Arthur grimly.

"The only thing we've got to worry about is that the Huns will give us one final strafe before they beat it," said Joe. "That would be typical of them, when they know they're licked, to do all the damage they can, and then run away."

"Poor old Sam," said Arthur. "Too bad he couldn't have lived long enough to have seen us rescued."

"We're not rescued yet," remarked Sergeant Connors drily. He had just joined the group.

"Not yet maybe," said Joe, "but it'll be soon all right."

"Let's hope so," exclaimed the sergeant fervently.

In eager silence the men waited. They formed the habit of silence and little conversation was

held, the men somehow seeming to have the idea that a noise might in some way break the spell.

Long weary hours they waited. Scouts sent out reported the Germans still in the vicinity, and Harold did not dare take a chance on getting his band through the enemy lines. Naturally he could not abandon his wounded, and he knew what it meant if wounded men fell into the hands of the Germans. Sometimes they were taken care of, sometimes they were killed in cold blood, and only too often much worse fates befell them. Once with his own eyes Harold had seen an American soldier crucified against the side of a barn door. His men had seen it too and for a long time afterwards it had been most difficult to hold them in check.

He tried to wait in patience the coming of the deliverers, for no one questioned now that help was at hand. He tried to instill patience into his men, but it was not an easy thing to do. They were all for dashing out and fighting their way through the ranks of the enemy; they forgot their hunger and their fatigue; they forgot that in all probability they were outnumbered ten to one. They wanted to get back among their fellows and they were willing to pay the price.

Night came on and the battle raged closer and



closer to them. With the coming of darkness came also a certain relaxation and some of the men went to sleep. Not Joe, however. And if Joe did not sleep it follows almost as a matter of course that Arthur, too, was awake. They had plans on foot.

“We’ll ask the lieutenant,” said Joe.

They sought out Harold and laid their scheme before him.

He listened in silence, but when Joe, who acted as spokesman, had finished talking he readily gave his consent.

Their plan was briefly this: to make their way through to the American, or French, lines, report the position of their company to the commander, and act as guides in directing the rescue.

It was a dangerous undertaking, but at the same time it was a rather necessary one. If help was to come it was most important that the location of the people who needed help should be known. Joe and Arthur proposed carrying the information through to the advancing troops.

It was pitch dark when they set out. The woods were as black as a pocket, and it was almost impossible to see one’s hand before one’s face. Progress necessarily was slow. The two soldiers picked their way carefully, taking every precaution to make as little noise as possible.

Every few moments they halted and listened with ears strained for any sign of the enemy.

"Are you sure we are going in the right direction, Joe?" whispered Arthur during one of their stops.

"We seem to be going in the direction of the guns," said Joe.

"But they've quieted down so it's hard to tell just where they are."

"We're all right, I'm sure," said Joe confidently.

"All right then, go ahead."

They continued on their way. Once Arthur tripped and fell over a fallen branch, and came to the ground with a terrifying crash. The two young soldiers stood stock still for some moments scarcely daring to breathe lest their presence had been discovered by the enemy. But nothing happened and they stole forward once more. Presently they came to the bank of a stream.

They crept forward cautiously. The moon was out and through the rift in the forest caused by the watercourse, it shed its pale beams. It looked as if the little waves were covered with a shimmering blanket of glistening jewels.

"See anything Joe?" whispered Arthur after a moment.

“No,” said Joe, and then he suddenly gripped his companion by the arm in a vice-like grasp.

“Ssh,” he hissed.

Arthur saw nothing, but he sank back among the bushes, and kept perfectly silent, waiting for Joe to enlighten him further as to the cause of his alarm. Nor did he have long to wait.

A moment later he heard footsteps on the gravelly bank of the little stream and a German soldier came in view. He had a gun over his shoulder, and in the dim light seemed to be of gigantic proportions. Evidently he was a sentry, and it was apparent that his beat was going to take him within a very few feet of the spot where the two Americans were crouched.

Nearer and nearer he came. Arthur's only thought was that he would pass them by without discovering their presence. Any idea of attacking him had not entered his head. Not so with Joe, however. His motto was “action” first, last, and always.

The German had not seen them, that was evident. He walked along as if he was entirely unsuspecting of any danger; his pace was steady and he looked neither to the right nor to the left. Joe had removed his hand from his companion's arm, but Arthur could feel that the air was charged

with some sort of electricity. Something was going to happen.

As the German sentry came abreast of their hiding place Joe suddenly sprang at him, and seizing him by the throat bore him to the ground. Over and over the two men rolled, and aside from their heavy breathing neither one of them uttered a sound. First one and then the other was on top, but Arthur could not tell which was which. All he could see was a black, writhing mass.

They fought and struggled on the bank of the little stream, and truly it must have seemed a strange sight if any one had been there to witness it. Here were two men, neither one of whom knew the other, neither one having anything against the other, and yet they were each struggling desperately to take away from his antagonist his most precious possession,—life. But no such thoughts were in Joe's mind. All he knew was that unless he killed the German he himself would be killed. And all Germans were his enemies; he hated them all and loathed them with a bitter loathing.

The bank sloped somewhat where they were struggling, and as was to be expected it was not long before their efforts had carried them down to the edge of the stream and even into the water

itself. And then came Joe's opportunity. The fact that it was given him only by the luckiest of chances had nothing to do with its effects.

The German's head had struck a sharp stone on the bank of the stream and he had been partially stunned as a result. Joe soon had him by the throat and was holding his head under water. Gradually his opponent's resistance slackened, and it was not long before he was lying limply in his hands. He held the unresisting body under water for a moment to make sure the job was done thoroughly, and then he rose to his feet and looked about for Arthur.

"That you, Joe?" a dark figure inquired of him.

"Yeah," said Joe hastily. "We better get moving too."

"Is he dead?"

"Dunno," said Joe. "I don't think so though."

"Going to leave him here?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"It's as good a place as any, I suppose," said Arthur. "Let's go."

They waded across the stream and were soon in the woods on the other side. If possible they were more cautious than ever now. They knew

there must be Germans all about them, and that the slightest mistake might be fatal. And to add to their difficulties the woods seemed to be thicker on this side of the stream than they were on the one they had just left.

They had not gone far when they found themselves in a particularly thick cluster of underbrush. It was in emerging from it that they found themselves in a situation far more dangerous than the adventure they had had on the bank of the stream.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ON THE ROAD

**J**OE in the lead, they came to the edge of the clump of bushes and parted the branches carefully, preparatory to emerging. They stood still for a moment listening intently for any sound of the enemy. They heard nothing, however, and presently stole forward, stepping silently and stealthily.

They did not get far, however. Two giant trees were in front of them, perhaps ten feet apart, and in order to go ahead the two young soldiers had to pass between them. They heard nothing and saw nothing, and for the moment they suspected nothing. They had not relaxed their vigilance, but for some reason they did feel easier momentarily. It might have been better if they had been more suspicious.

As Joe came abreast of the two trees a dark figure suddenly sprang out at him, swung at him with its bare fist, and felled him to the earth. Arthur was too startled for the moment to do anything, and before he had a chance to recover his



wits, he too had received a stunning blow full on the point of the chin. Down he went like a log beside his comrade.

It had all happened so suddenly that neither one of the two Americans knew what had happened to them. The blows they had received had rendered them completely unconscious, and for all that either one of them was concerned, or knew, they might as well have been dead. But they had not been killed and presently they recovered consciousness.

Joe opened his eyes and passed his hand over his brow dazedly. He could see nothing and he had no clear recollection of what had happened to him. Arthur was in a similar situation.

Then Joe remembered passing the big tree, and he naturally supposed that they were in the hands of the enemy.

Imagine his surprise, therefore, when he heard a voice close beside him remark: "Gosh, Charlie, you certainly hit this guy a terrible wallop."

"I wanted to make sure of him," said another voice, evidently belonging to the man addressed as Charlie. "You have to hit a Heinie pretty hard sometimes. Their heads are awful hard, you know."

Joe and Arthur were lying side by side on the

ground, and as they lay there in silence they tried to figure out what was going on. It was a difficult task.

"Who'd have ever thought that these guys were Yanks?" exclaimed the man who had spoken first.

"Not I," said Charlie.

"Are they awake yet?"

"I am," said Joe.

"And so am I," Arthur echoed.

"Can you walk?" inquired one of the men who were kneeling over them. "How's your face?"

"It hurts," said Joe. "Where did you fellows come from anyway?"

"The United States," answered Charlie, who was evidently disposed to divulge no military secrets until he knew a little more about the two men he and his companion had captured.

"I know that," said Joe. "No one but an American could hit as hard as you did."

"Well, we was out looking for Huns," Charlie explained. "When we heard you two guys coming through them bushes we thought we had found a couple, sure enough."

"Why didn't you shoot us instead of trying to uppercut us?" Arthur inquired. "You had us cold."

"That's just the reason," Charlie explained.

“We was told to bring back a live one if we could.”

“Well, we’re alive and that’s about all,” said Joe soberly. He and Arthur were sitting up now, and were gradually recovering from the effects of the blows they had received.

“Where you been?”

“Back in the woods there surrounded by Germans for about three days. Maybe it was three months, I don’t know.”

“You’re the guys we was sent out to rescue then,” exclaimed Charlie. “Is there any of you left alive?”

“A few,” said Joe, “but there won’t be long unless help gets there pretty gol darned quick.”

“Can you walk?”

“You bet we can,” Arthur exclaimed. “That is if there is some food for us at the end of it.”

“Come along then,” said Charlie. “We’ll take you back and let you talk to the C. O.”

With their two captors leading the way Joe and Arthur set out on their journey once more. The night was far spent and the first faint rays of the morning sun were painting the sky as they passed into the American lines. They were fairly drunk from fatigue and lack of food, but their minds were clear and their senses alert as they were

ushered into the presence of the officer to whom they were to make their report.

It did not take them long to tell all that they knew, and they were detailed to act as guides in directing the troops who were to make one more determined effort to reach the beleaguered company cut off in the forest.

"Can you stand it?" the officer inquired.

"If those fellows back there in the woods can still hold out, I guess we can stand about anything," exclaimed Joe stoutly.

"Good," said the officer approvingly.

Joe and Arthur stepped out of the ruined house which was serving as headquarters. There was a bombardment going on by both sides. A shrill whistling sound came to their ears, heralding the approach of an enemy shell. Both men threw themselves to the ground instantly, and the dull heavy explosion which followed almost immediately told them that they had not been a moment too soon.

The roads leading into the forest were congested with troops going forward and the Germans were trying to drop shells on them. There was a crossroads a quarter of a mile away, and a giant missile fell scarcely fifty yards away from this spot. Three more followed close on the heels

of the first one. The men marched on undisturbed.

Two regiments passed the crossroads, and hardly had the last man gone safely by when a German shell landed squarely in the center of the junction. A detachment of engineers appeared a moment later and filled in the crater.

Presently a shell burst in front of Brigade Headquarters, killing two officers and two cycle dispatch riders. Joe and Arthur were seated against a large tree eating some bacon, sandwiches, and drinking some hot coffee, when a piece of metal, singing a siren song, flew past them, and tore a big hole in the tree above their heads. The two men ate on as if nothing had happened.

Twenty-five yards back of them a huge naval gun sent out a shell every two or three minutes, and the concussion was enough to put out a lighted match. The noise was earsplitting.

At seven o'clock the Americans attacked. The noise of the barrage was indescribable, while all the German cannon, machine guns, and automatic rifles were let loose. But the Americans kept on going. They seemed to have no fear, and they stopped for nothing.

Tanks moved up the roads to join in the battle. Airplanes thronged the air above; and a number

fell to earth, some German and some American. Two observers leaped from their balloon, which was in flames, while they floated away upheld by parachutes. A battery of horse-drawn field guns raced down the road, and then suddenly left the road and plunged down a hill to escape a deluge of shells and shrapnel.

An automobile rushed past, dodging in and out of the traffic. Another battery came along and as it passed the crossroads a shell burst fairly in its midst, with untold horror as the result. A shell exploded close beside some stretcher bearers coming up the road; every one of them was knocked prostrate, but a moment later they were on their feet again carrying their wounded unconscious to the dressing station.

Foot by foot, step by step, the Americans fought their way forward. With the bayonet, with hand grenades, they went on, stopping for nothing but death itself. And every man who went down fell facing the enemy. Men who had been clerks, young doctors, lawyers, college and school boys, fought with the most magnificent courage, courage never surpassed by any army in history. They did not need officers to encourage them, but to hold them back, and when their officers were gone they kept on fighting.



Nothing could stop them. Many a brave lad made the supreme sacrifice, but only that his fellows might sweep on and over. The Germans resisted desperately, but these American boys were not to be denied. Never was there a more costly fight than this, and never a one with more glorious result. The Germans were driven back steadily, relentlessly, and when afternoon came Harold and what remained of his little band were free once more.

Haggard they were, and unkempt. Some of them were almost on the verge of delirium. They were wounded, half starved, and weakened from lack of sleep and from exposure. But they were proud in the thought that they had held off a force greatly superior in numbers, better equipped and fed, which had boasted that it was going to take them alive or dead, and had been thwarted by sheer pluck and Yankee nerve.

The dead were given full military honors, the wounded sent off to the hospital, and those who remained unharmed by shot and shell were ordered back to billets in a little French town behind the lines to rest. They were through with battles for a time, but many things were to happen to them.



## CHAPTER XIX

### IN BILLETTS

**H**AROLD was quartered in the home of *Monsieur le Maire*. It was a charming French family, hospitable and delighted to act as hosts to the young American officer. They were unstinted in their praise of the soldiers who had come from across the seas to help the sister republic in her gallant fight against the cruellest invader the world has ever known. They knew that America was not fighting for any selfish reason; not for gain or glory, but to help make the world a decent and peaceful place, which could never happen if the Germans should win the war.

Besides the mayor and his wife, M. and Mme. Herlant, there were two sons and two daughters in the family. The sons, of course, were with the colors. The elder daughter was away from home serving with the Red Cross. Only the youngest remained with her parents.

Harold enjoyed himself immensely in this French home. It had been weeks since he had slept in a bed between sheets, and many, many

days since he had had an opportunity to take a bath. He also reveled in the beautiful landscape, the rolling hills and the atmosphere of peace. The experiences he had passed through recently seemed far away and unreal. True the distant booming of the guns occasionally came to his ears, but the sound for some reason seemed rather soothing than disquieting.

The men, too, were making the most of their holiday. Joe and Arthur took long walks through the country, fished in the streams, and played with the children of the village. Baseball games were played, and while drills were held every day, discipline was greatly relaxed, and the time devoted to rest and relaxation. The company also received entire new equipment. Never in the world's history has an army been cared for as were our American troops in France.

One day Harold was strolling down the road with Monsieur Herlant when he spied one of his men some distance ahead suddenly jump behind a hedge which lined the road and disappear from sight. He thought he had recognized Arthur, but was not certain and when he and the mayor reached the spot no one was to be seen.

Another road branched off from the one on which they were walking, and it occurred to Har-

old that the soldier had gone that way. There was nothing very startling in that, but the young officer was puzzled because the man had very plainly wished to avoid meeting him. However, he soon forgot about it and it was not until that evening that the incident came into his mind again.

Arthur had reported to him in connection with some piece of company business, and Harold took occasion to question him.

“Didn’t I see you down the road this afternoon?” he inquired.

“I don’t think so, sir,” replied Arthur, but he seemed uneasy and anxious to avoid Harold’s glance.

Harold noticed this and also the fact that Arthur seemed desirous of discontinuing the conversation. He did not know what to think of it, and he could think of no reason why Arthur should act this way. He tried to dismiss the matter from his mind, but for some reason he could not seem to forget it. It is curious how little things, or seemingly insignificant incidents will stick in one’s mind, no matter how great an effort is made to put them aside.

So it was that Harold found himself thinking about Arthur a great deal. He told himself that he did not mistrust him; how could he mistrust one

who on so many occasions had proved himself a loyal and devoted soldier? But he spoke to the other men about Arthur, inquiring as to his movements and habits recently. Nor were the replies he got entirely reassuring. Arthur, it seemed, had been going about alone to a considerable degree. No one knew just where he went or what he did, not even Joe, and hitherto Joe had shared his comrade's every thought. Harold became more and more disturbed about the whole thing.

"He seems to hang around that old château up on the hill there," said Joe. "Why he does it I'm sure I don't know."

"He hasn't got a girl up there, has he?" Harold asked.

Joe grinned. "I don't know, sir," he said. "Art always was pretty fond of the ladies though."

That must be it, Harold decided. Arthur had a girl, and like a good many others in similar circumstances he was shy about it, and afraid of being teased. He heaved a sigh of relief. He had not wanted to be suspicious of Arthur, but he had been in spite of himself. Now he laughed at his suspicions, and proceeded promptly to forget all about them.

They were to be in billets ten days longer and

every one strove to make the most of it. One of their cares was to keep all minds so busy that there would be no time to think about returning to the line; their aim was to put fighting out of their minds for the present. In other words to give a complete rest to minds as well as to bodies.

Harold's hosts had many tales to tell of the awful things the Germans had done in France. One story in particular struck him as displaying especial fiendishness.

Monsieur Herlant had had a nephew in the army, a young man just come of age. This nephew, Raoul Destin by name, had always been very fond of pets. His home had been filled with dogs, cats, little animals and birds of all kinds. Imagine his indignation, then, when one day his regiment was passing through a village hard on the heels of the retreating Germans, to see a cat pinned against the door of a partially wrecked barn. And the cat was still alive. A thin sharp knife driven through its body held it against the door, and it was yowling and screaming with pain, a truly pitiful sight.

The sufferings of the little animal were more than Raoul could endure, and with an exclamation of anger he stepped from his place in the line. First of all he intended to remove the knife, and

then, if it were necessary, put the cat out of its misery. He stepped up to the barn and placing one hand over the body of the cat he grasped the handle of the knife with the other and started to withdraw it as gently as possible.

He had pulled the knife scarcely more than a quarter of an inch, however, when there was a frightful explosion. Raoul was literally blown to bits; there was not enough left of him even for his best friend to recognize. He disappeared right off the face of the earth.

“You mean the Germans had attached a bomb to the other side of the door so that when the knife was pulled out it would explode?” demanded Harold who had listened to this recital of German frightfulness with growing horror.

“Precisely,” said Monsieur Herlant.

“It seems almost unbelievable,” exclaimed Harold hotly. “How can people who pretend to be civilized do such things?”

“Ah, my boy,” said the mayor sadly, “you do not know half the things the Germans have done here in France. I hope you may never know. They are too horrible.”

“Well,” said Harold, “I must say I had to come over here and see some of these things with my own eyes before I could believe them. I used to



hear about the German atrocities, but I couldn't realize what they were until I got to France and saw some of the things myself."

"And remember this," said the mayor. "The things they have done in France they have also done in Belgium, and in Poland, in Serbia, and in Rumania. Some say worse in those places than here."

"I don't see how they could be worse," exclaimed Harold.

"Do you wonder," the mayor continued, "that the English and Canadian officers have found it impossible at times to make their men take prisoners?"

"Not when they have seen their own officers crucified in front of their very eyes," said Harold. "Oh, it's awful."

"All war is awful," said the mayor, "but never has such fiendishness been practiced by any nation as by Germany in this war. And all of it so unnecessary too."

"Yes," said Harold. "They have thought they could scare us by all these horrible things, but if they had fought fairly they might have won the war. Certainly I don't believe the United States would have come in if it had not been for their dirty submarine warfare."



“They’re stupid,” exclaimed Monsieur Herlant disgustedly. “They judge all others by themselves.”

“We’ll teach them better,” exclaimed Harold confidently as he rose to depart. “They’ve got to behave if they want to live in the same world with us.”

He passed outdoors, and spied Arthur going down the road with something that looked very much like a bunch of flowers under his arm.

## CHAPTER XX

### A STRANGE MEETING

**T**HE following morning Harold met Joe on the street, and stopped to speak with him. "How's everything going, Joe?" he inquired.

"Fine, sir," said Joe.

"It's not as exciting here as it was up there in the woods, is it?"

"No," said Joe, "but there may be something going on around here after all."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Harold, puzzled by the tone of Joe's voice.

"Do you remember the pigeons we used to see flying over us?" Joe inquired.

"Of course I do," said Harold. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," said Joe, "I've seen more of them recently."

"Carrying messages to the Germans?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Sergeant Connors shot one of them yesterday,

and it had a message in German tied around its leg just the way that one did that came into our shell hole that night."

"Why wasn't it reported to me?" Harold demanded.

"I don't know, sir," said Joe. "I thought it had been."

"Where is Sergeant Connors?"

"I haven't seen him since last night, sir," said Joe.

At that moment, however, Sergeant Connors appeared down the road. Harold waited for him in silence.

"What about these pigeons?" he demanded when the sergeant had reached the spot where he and Joe were standing.

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Connors, saluting. "I was on my way to report it to you last night when I met Captain Wood. I told him about it and he ordered me not to say anything about it until I heard from him further. This morning he told me to take it up with you."

"Come to my room," said Harold. "You too, Joe."

A few moments later the three soldiers were seated in the little second-story room in the mayor's house which Harold occupied. When the

doors were carefully shut and locked Harold turned to Sergeant Connors.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"Well, sir," said Connors, "there isn't much to tell. Yesterday afternoon I was taking a walk with Private Murray when we seen a pigeon circling around overhead. Murray knows something about pigeons and he spotted it right away for a carrier. The bird lit in a tree for some reason and I took a shot at it. Got him the first crack too. Well, we found a message tied to its leg and, sure enough, it was written in German. We was quite some distance from this village when we got the bird, and by the time we got back it was pretty dark. The first officer I seen was Captain Wood and I reported it to him. That's all, sir."

"Do you think the pigeon came from some place near here?" Harold asked.

"Yes, sir, I do," said the sergeant readily.

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, sir, the bird was fresh, and Murray says it acted like one that was just starting out."

"Does any one keep pigeons around here?" inquired Harold.

"I've seen one once or twice flying around the

old castle up on the hill there," said Joe. "Whether they came from there or not I don't know."

"Can you read German, Sergeant?" Harold asked. "You can't, can you?"

"No, sir," said Connors. "Captain Wood translated the message."

"Do you know what it said?"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant responded quickly. "I have a copy of it here," and he handed a slip of paper to Harold.

The young officer unfolded it, and read it at a glance. "Two divisions moving up in reserve," he read; "first army has orders to push attacks unceasingly."

Harold folded the bit of paper and put it in his pocket without offering any comment. He dismissed the two soldiers and then sat down to think things over. Something would have to be done soon that was certain.

It was most puzzling the way these pigeons carrying messages to the enemy seemed to cross his path so frequently. He wished his brother Bob were with him, for he felt sure he would have some suggestions to offer towards a solution of the problem. But there was no use wishing. Bob was away with his squadron somewhere and could

not be located. Even if he could be found Harold knew very well that he could not be spared to take part in a spy hunt.

The thing to do was to turn the whole matter over to the Intelligence Department and let them puzzle it out. Meanwhile, Harold decided, there could be no harm in his doing a little investigating on his own account. His time was all taken until that evening, but after supper he thought he would take a little stroll in the direction of the château and just look over the ground a bit.

When evening came he set out. The night was overcast and no stars were to be seen. It was very dark on the road, but Harold could make out the dim outlines of the hedgerows and had no difficulty in picking his way. He was alone and unarmed except for his pistol. He had not thought of being nervous, however; in fact, he rather enjoyed the prospect of an adventure somewhat out of the ordinary line.

He did not know what lay ahead of him. For all he knew he might be starting out on a ridiculous wild good chase. But it was a diversion, and now that he was entirely rested from the strain of the fighting he had gone through he welcomed it. Certainly there could be no doubt that some one behind the Allied lines was sending messages

to the enemy, and it was entirely within the realm of possibility that that person might be hiding in the neighborhood. There could be no harm in scouting around a little bit anyway.

After a walk of perhaps twenty minutes he saw the vague outlines of the château faintly visible against the sky. He stepped to one side of the road and looked at it for some time. He recalled the stories he had heard of this old castle. It had belonged to one of the foremost families of France. Early in the war they had been forced to forsake their home and flee to Paris for safety, for the tide of German invasion had swept over this part of the country in all its force. The mistress of the house had since died, and the master was in service. The occupants of the château were an aged French couple and their niece, who acted as caretakers.

When the Germans had been driven out of this district they had, as was their custom, stripped the house of everything they could pack up and carry away. It had been left almost bare of furniture, and the caretakers lived in only one wing. It was said that a ghost had taken possession of the main portion, and the villagers professed to have heard strange sounds there at night, and to have observed lights moving around when they



were certain no one was in that wing of the château. The caretakers had told them so when they had made inquiries the following day.

Harold decided to take a turn around the château just to get the lay of the land. He made his way quietly and stealthily through a break in the high box hedge that surrounded the building and entered the grounds proper. He stopped for a moment and listened; hearing nothing, he advanced cautiously until he stood beneath the windows of the wing occupied by the caretakers. A light shone dimly through the glass of one window, but it was too high for him to see in. He listened, his ears strained to catch the faintest noise. Nothing happened to disturb the peaceful quiet of the place.

He moved away, following the line of the building until he had made the complete circuit and found himself back at his starting point. He had not heard or seen anything. He decided to take a turn down by the farm buildings. Following a line of poplar trees that grew along the driveway he soon arrived at the barn. And then he heard voices. He withdrew into the blackness of a corner and waited.

Steps sounded on the gravel walk, and the voices came nearer. Evidently a man and a woman were

approaching. Harold almost held his breath, while he strove to hear what was being said.

"Yes," said the man, "you can't be too careful."

"But he seem very nice," lisped the woman with a slight trace of an accent.

The man's voice seemed strangely familiar to Harold, but just at that moment he could not place it. Then the man spoke again.

"Don't trust him," he said. "Don't trust anybody."

"I am so sorry to hear you say zat," said the woman soberly. "I like him so much, and he iss fond of pigeons like me."

"That's just the trouble," exclaimed the man harshly. "He is too fond of them. At least he says he is, but that's only a dodge. Don't trust him I tell you."

They passed on out of hearing, leaving Harold completely mystified but very much excited. So there were pigeons there after all; and no doubt the girl whose voice he had heard was the niece of the two old caretakers. She must be in charge of the pigeons and whether she was innocent of what was being done with them or not of course he had no means of knowing. Not for the present at least.

Who was the man? His voice certainly sounded very familiar, and Harold was certain he had heard it before; where he could not be sure. At any rate the man seemed to know what the pigeons were for, and was warning the girl against some one who was apparently taking more interest in them than seemed advisable. This "some one" Harold decided was more than likely one of his own American soldiers, Arthur perhaps. It might be that this was the girl Arthur came up to the château to see; perhaps he too suspected the occupants of the old house and was merely using the girl as a blind in order to get more information. That must be it, Harold decided. Arthur was evidently smarter than he had been given credit for, and no doubt he was saying nothing about the matter until he had gathered a little more information. What an ass he had been to suspect Arthur anyway.

He stepped out from the protection of the barn and started to retrace his steps towards the village. He was revolving the events of the evening in his mind and for that reason neglected to keep the sharp lookout he had maintained earlier. Perhaps he was careless. At all events he had not gone more than a few steps when the dark figure of a man suddenly sprang out from behind

a tree directly in front of him. There was a blinding flash right in his face and he fell heavily to the ground.

A moment later he realized that it was a flashlight which had startled him so and not a gun at all. So great is the power of suggestion that expecting a pistol shot he had thought he had seen one, and for the brief fraction of a second had imagined he had been shot. He was rather surprised, therefore, to find he was unhurt, and he was a thousand times more surprised to hear himself called by name. And in his own brother's voice too.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ON THE TRAIL

“**B**OB,” exclaimed Harold. “Where did you come from?”

“Ssh,” whispered Bob. “Not so loud. Come with me.”

He assisted Harold to his feet and the two brothers started back towards the village in silence.

Neither of them spoke until they had left the grounds of the château behind them. Then Harold could stand it no longer; it was a complete mystery to him how his brother could suddenly turn up in such an unexpected way and in such an unlooked-for place.

“How did it happen, Bob?” he inquired in a low tone.

“Tell you later,” replied Bob noncommittally. Nor would he say anything more until they were seated in Harold’s room in the mayor’s house.

“Surprised to see me?” asked Bob with a grin.

“I should say I was,” exclaimed Harold.

"You're just about the last person on this green earth that I did expect to see."

"Well, let me have a glass of water, and I'll tell you all about it. I'm dry as a bone."

Harold went to the door and called for Alphonse, an aged servant in the Herlant home. Madame Herlant appeared to say that Alphonse was out that evening but that she would attend to the young American's wants. Accordingly she soon appeared with the glass of water and was introduced to Bob. She welcomed him most cordially and expressed the hope that he would remain with them as their guest as long as he desired. "They were so fond of his brother," she said, "and it would give them great pleasure to entertain another member of the Cook family in their home."

Bob thanked her and replied that very likely he would avail himself of her kind invitation.

Madame Herlant withdrew and Harold turned to his brother.

"Now tell me what you are doing around here," he said.

"Who's Alphonse?" Bob asked.

"Oh, he's an old Alsatian who escaped out of Alsace and made his way into France," said Harold. "Poor old fellow, he couldn't stand the

Germans any longer. The Herlants gave him a home here, and in return he does odd jobs and acts as a sort of servant for them."

"He came out since the war began?"

"About two years ago, I think. Why do you ask?"

"No particular reason; I just want to know the people living in the house, that's all."

"Well, if you suspect Alphonse of anything, you're going to get fooled," laughed Harold. "I never met any one who hates the Germans worse than Alphonse. You ought to hear him talk about them. He has lived in Alsace and he knows what he is talking about too."

"All right," said Bob. "Now you want to know what I am doing around here, don't you?"

"I certainly do."

"Well," said Bob, "I'm looking for pigeons."

"That's what I was doing tonight myself."

"I supposed you were," said Bob with a smile. "If I'd wanted to I could have ended your hunt pretty quickly though. You were wandering along as though you thought you were on Broad Street at home. I had you cold, my boy."

"I know you did," Harold acknowledged sheepishly. "I don't know what got into me to be so careless."



"I haven't told you how I happen to be here," said Bob. "I'm on leave. You remember the last time I saw you we were talking about pigeons, and you asked me to report it at headquarters. I reported it all right and found that others were just as disturbed about them as you were. Well, two days ago I got a ten days' permission, and having no particular place I wanted to spend it, I thought I'd take a run down here and see how the birds were getting on. I found that they were getting on very well indeed. By that I mean they were still being sent across the lines at regular intervals and no one knew where they came from or who was sending them out.

"I offered to try and get a little information, and they told me that they had traced the birds to somewhere near here. I got here this afternoon, and heard the natives talking about the old chateau up there on the hill and so this evening I decided to wander up there and take a look around. I hardly expected to find my own brother there, too, though."

"There was a man and a girl talking about pigeons up there to-night," said Harold.

"I know it," said Bob. "I heard them."

"Where were you?"

"About four feet away from you when you were

standing in that corner of the barn. I could have touched you if I'd wanted."

"Gosh," exclaimed Harold, greatly chagrined. "What a boob I am."

"I was there ahead of you," said Bob. "I don't know that I blame you for not seeing me. It was the darkest spot I ever saw."

"Well, what do you think of things?" Harold asked.

"I don't know enough about it yet," said Bob. "It's worth hanging around the château though, I think. We'll do a little more investigating tomorrow."

The two brothers sat and talked for a long time that night. They had many things to say to each other, letters from home to compare, and stories to tell of what they had done since they had seen each other last. Bob was greatly interested in the account of Harold's company in the forest. He had heard about it, he said, and also professed to have heard that his brother was to be decorated for his share in the exploit.

"I hadn't heard anything about that myself," said Harold. "At the same time I must say I wouldn't get very sore if it was true."

"I guess not," said Bob. "Think how proud Father would be."

“That’s the main inducement,” said Harold. “I’d rather have it for his sake than for my own.”

They turned in presently, sleeping together in the big double bed that Harold had enjoyed all by himself since he had been living in the Herlant family. Bright and early in the morning they were up and ready for whatever the day might bring forth. Neither boy had any idea of what lay ahead.

Harold’s time was pretty much his own, so he was with his brother practically all day. They wandered around the old village, talked with the natives and learned many things of interest concerning the place and its inhabitants. In the course of the morning they met Joe and Harold made inquiries as to the progress of Arthur’s love affair. Arthur had disappeared the evening before, Joe reported, and he thought he had gone up to the châtaeu, but was not certain. Arthur was on sentry duty that morning and he had not seen him at all.

“Are you perfectly sure of this man Arthur?” Bob asked when they had passed on. Harold had told him about his suspicions of Arthur, and how groundless he had decided them to be.

“Perfectly,” said Harold.

“It doesn’t pay to be too sure of anybody these

days, you know," said Bob. "Strange things can happen."

"You needn't worry about Arthur," said Harold.

"We'll keep him in mind though," said Bob quietly.

When they returned to the house for their noon-day meal they found Alphonse waiting in Harold's room. He seemed somewhat excited and evidently had something he considered important to say.

"What is it, Alphonse?" inquired Harold, noting the old man's agitation.

"You are looking for pigeons?" he asked. Alphonse, by the way, spoke English almost without any trace of accent.

"What do you mean?" demanded Harold, feigning great surprise.

"You were looking for pigeons," Alphonse repeated.

"Who told you that?" said Bob, looking at the old man closely.

"I know," said Alphonse, shaking his head mysteriously. Harold had sometimes wondered if all the troubles the old man had gone through had not affected his reason. "I know where the pigeons are too."

"You do?" demanded Harold. "How do you know?"

"I see them."

"Where?"

"At the château."

"What were you doing at the château?" inquired Harold.

"I walk by there this morning when I am out looking for mushrooms," said Alphonse. "It was very early in the day and the sun he was not hardly up. I walk up near the house and as I pass by underneath the windows I hear the pigeons cooing."

"You said you saw them," Bob reminded him.

"It is the same," said the old man. "I need not hear pigeons to know that they are there. One cannot mistake them."

"What are the pigeons for?" asked Bob, thinking perhaps he could trap him.

"Do you not know?" Alphonse looked at his questioner cunningly with his head cocked on one side. "If you do not you are the only one around here who does not. But you do know."

Bob laughed. "I guess you're right there, Alphonse," he said. "But are you sure of this?"

"Monsieur, I am positive," exclaimed Alphonse earnestly.

"What do you think we ought to do about it?"

A change came over Alphonse's face. It had showed seriousness before, but now it became livid with passion.

"Those pigeons help the Huns," he cried fiercely. "Get 'em, I say. Get 'em." His face was purple with rage, and he clenched his fists until his knuckles showed white.

"You won't say anything about this to any one else, will you, Alphonse?" asked Harold.

"To no one," the old man promised.

"But you go get 'em," he cried. "Get 'em. Get 'em."

He flung himself out of the room, and went muttering off down the hall. Bob shut the door and then turned and faced his brother.

"Your old friend is a little cracked, but I guess there's not much doubt as to what he thinks of the Germans, is there?"

"Just as I told you," said Harold.

"Do you suppose he's telling the truth?"

"I see no reason to think he's not. As you say he's undoubtedly a bit off, but I doubt if he'd go wrong on a thing like this."

"I guess we better have a look at the château then, hadn't we? When shall we go up there?"

"I don't know. The only trouble is they may



get wind that somebody is on their trail, and beat it before we get there if we wait too long."

"We can go this afternoon."

"Had we better take a squad of soldiers along just in case we should run into more trouble than we expected?" said Harold.

"I'd rather just the two of us went," said Bob.

"Suit's me all right," his brother agreed. "When do we start, this afternoon or wait until this evening?"

"I vote for evening," said Bob. "We can sneak up to the house when it's dark and not be seen. If we should go there by daylight, they would see us coming and it might all be off."

Harold was not sure just what this objection was, but he expressed himself as perfectly satisfied with the arrangement, and so it was agreed that that evening they should go up to the château and investigate.

They questioned Alphonse further that afternoon as to the occupants of the château, but he knew of no one besides the caretakers and their niece. He said he had never seen any one else around the place, and from all he could learn no one else ever came near there.

"They do say," he confided in a low voice, and after a careful look about him, "that the pigeons



is brought from Germany in an airship and at night the old man goes out and meets it and brings them in.''

Harold gave his brother a sly wink at this. But then, he thought later, why was such a thing impossible after all? Strange things had been happening ever since the war started and why was this any more impossible of accomplishment than some of the other seemingly miraculous feats?

The two young soldiers waited impatiently for the coming of darkness, and the hour when they should start on their expedition. They ate little supper that evening because they were too excited to be hungry, and as soon as the meal was over they slipped upstairs, excusing themselves on the plea that they were on night duty that night. Which was literally the truth.

Their preparations were fully made and as soon as it was dark they stole quietly out of the house eager to find out if what Alphonse had told them was so, or merely a phantom of his poor half-crazed brain.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AT THE CHÂTEAU

A DROP of rain splashed against Harold's face as the two boys stepped out into the night. The sky was overcast and low-hanging clouds obscured the moon. The wind was rising, and no stars were to be seen. It was growing cold and the two brothers pulled their hats down farther over their faces as they started up the lonely road.

"It's a bad night, Bob," said Harold with a shiver.

"Yes," Bob agreed. "A good night for what we want though."

"I hope so," said Harold.

They continued in silence. The rain increased until it came down in torrents. The wind shrieked through the poplar trees which lined the road, and whipped their coats about their legs, while pools of water formed on the roadway, making the walking hard and unpleasant.

The moon disappeared from view, and the dark-

ness became intense. But with heads down to the storm the young soldiers plodded onward. A faint light flickered in the château far ahead, their only guide.

"What a night," Harold exclaimed.

"It's a terror all right," agreed Bob.

"What do you suppose we are running into?"

"Tell you later," said Bob. "What's that?"

They stopped and listened intently. The beating of the rain and the souging of the wind in the trees was the only sound that came to their ears.

"What was it, Bob?" asked Harold eagerly.

"What did you hear?"

"I thought I heard somebody running through the field here."

"Are you sure?"

"No, but it sounded like it."

They stood still and listened for some minutes. They heard nothing but the storm, however, and presently they started ahead again. Neither boy would have admitted it, but they both would have welcomed an excuse to turn back. They felt "creepy." There seemed to be something in the air that boded ill, and they could not help but be conscious of it.

Nearer they came to the château, and the feeling

increased. Outlined against the murky sky they could see the faint outlines of the old castle and the building seemed forbidding and to be surrounded with all sorts of possibilities for evil. Unconsciously they slackened their pace.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," exclaimed Harold in a low voice. "I'm getting sort of panicky."

"I feel queer myself," said Bob. "What do you suppose it is?"

"Search me," said his brother. "I've gone over the top and haven't felt half as nervous as I do now."

"It's the night, I guess," said Bob.

"Everything seems kind of unreal and ghostly."

"Exactly."

They stood still and gazed in silence at the flickering light shining dimly through the darkness from the window of the château. For some minutes neither of them spoke.

"Well," said Bob finally, "what are we going to do?"

"I hate to go back now," said Harold.

"So do I," Bob agreed. "At the same time," he added, "I must say I'm not having half as much fun out of this as I thought I was going to. I wish we'd brought a squad along."

"Too late now," said his brother.

"I know it," Bob admitted. He wiped the water off of his face with the back of his hand. His clothes were wet through.

"Ahead or back?" queried Harold.

"Ahead, I suppose," said Bob. "I wouldn't dare go back now."

"Why not?"

"What would every one think?"

"But who would know about it?"

"Alphonse."

"I'd forgotten him," said Harold. "Still we could make up some story to tell him easily enough."

"What could we say to ourselves though?"

"That's different," said Harold quickly.

"Come on."

They resumed their way and presently turned into the grounds of the château itself. They did not follow the driveway, but chose a course which led them over the lawns and among the big trees which loomed up like great gnarled giants in their path. They trod as softly as possible, but at every step their shoes oozed water and the sound they made seemed dangerously loud to the sensitive ears of the two young prowlers.

Nothing of an alarming nature happened, how-

ever, and it was not long before they were standing under the windows of the building.

“What now?” whispered Bob.

“Where’s the window we want?”

“On the other side of the house.”

“Sure?”

“Positive.”

“Come on then,” said Harold and started to pick his way carefully along under the lee of the old stone walls.

Every moment or two they stopped and listened. They also tried to see something but that was practically out of the question. Both boys were equipped with flashlights but they did not dare use them yet. They wanted to take as few chances as possible until the time came when they had no choice but to take risks. That time they had decided would come when they were inside the building. And how to get inside was the thing for them to settle at the present moment. Just where to make the attempt was another problem.

Bob touched his brother on the sleeve.

“Alphonse said it was the third window from this end, didn’t he?” he inquired.

“Yes,” Harold whispered in reply.

“This is it then.”

The window was about six feet from the ground,

and there was nothing to step on in order to get up to it.

"Make a cup of your hands and I'll get up there and see if I can't force the window," said Bob.

"No, you boost me," Harold protested.

"I'll go up there," said Bob. "I'm lighter than you are."

Harold made no further objection and a moment later Bob was standing with one foot in the "stirrup" made by his brother's hands and was feeling around the window casing to discover if he could find some way of forcing the window open.

"I never played burglar before," he whispered down to Harold.

"Ssh," said Harold softly. He was in no mood for joking.

Presently Bob asked to be let down. "Nothing doing," he announced. "I can't see a thing, and I can't feel anything either."

"Let me take a shot at it."

They were about to change places when they heard some one approaching. Crouched against the damp wall they waited with breath held in check, their right hands grasping the handles of the pistols in their belts.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of the footsteps, and soon they could make out the dark form



of some one coming their way. Would they be discovered? What would happen to them if they were? If they should be forced to use their revolvers would the noise arouse the household? What did the household consist of anyway? And if they did arouse the household and were then obliged to run away would not the pigeons,—granted, of course, that the pigeons were there,—be removed before they had a chance to give the alarm? If so, then the culprit would undoubtedly escape. These questions all crowded into the minds of the two boys as they flattened themselves against the wall of the old château.

A branch cracked from the trunk of one of the big trees in the yard. The sound was startling and both boys nearly cried out from nervousness. Meanwhile the stranger had now advanced until he was almost abreast of their hiding place.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE UNSEEN ENEMY

**W**HEN the stranger came directly opposite the spot where the two boys were crouched he stopped. Bob and Harold held their breath and waited, every nerve alert, for his next move. But apparently he had not seen them for after a tense moment he passed on, and presently disappeared from view around the corner of the building.

“Whew,” exclaimed Harold, drawing a long breath. “That was a close shave all right.”

“Too close for comfort,” Bob agreed.

“Think we’d better try it again?”

“I think so. Don’t you?”

“I suppose so. How about trying another window this time?”

“All right. There’s a pipe or a leader or something down by the corner, I think.”

“Let’s take a look at it.”

They slunk along beside the house, getting more drenched than ever, if that were possible, by the water dripping off the eaves.

"Boost me up this time," said Harold.

"Maybe you can break the glass with your pistol butt," Bob suggested.

"It would make a terrible noise," his brother objected.

"No one would ever hear it in this storm," said Bob confidently. "Try it anyway."

By the aid of the drain pipe and the boost Bob gave him, Harold presently found his shoulders abreast of the lower part of the window. He endeavored to raise it but, as he expected, he found it locked. Then he carefully removed his revolver from his belt, and after a cautious look about him and listening intently for a moment, he hit the glass a sharp blow with the butt.

There was a crash of falling glass and he jumped to the ground. Both boys maintained a strict silence for some moments, their ears strained for any sign that the sound had been heard.

The roar of the wind and the ceaseless splash of the rain were the only sounds to be heard, however, and a moment later their confidence was restored to them.

"So far so good," whispered Bob.

"Yes," said Harold. "Now to get inside and have a look around."

He grasped the window ledge in both hands and pulled himself up. All was silent inside the house and with the utmost caution he crawled through the opening in the broken window.

"All right," he called softly to Bob, who was still standing on the ground below.

Presently both young soldiers were inside the château.

"What's our program now?" whispered Harold.

For answer Bob produced his pocket flashlight and flashed it on the floor at their feet. The room was carpeted with a heavy velvet rug, and there were many pieces of massive furniture about. The furniture was all covered with chintz, and the room very plainly had not been used for some time.

The boys advanced cautiously, feeling their way, and when it was absolutely necessary, using their flashlights for a quick look about them. Presently they came to a door leading into the adjoining room.

"Try it," Bob whispered.

Harold took hold of the knob, and was just about to turn it when there was the sharp report of a pistol and a bullet tore its way through the panel of the door. Quick as a flash Harold jumped to one side and flattened himself against the wall.

Absolute silence followed in the wake of the shot. Outside the wind howled and the rain beat down in torrents. But in the château all was as quiet as the tomb. It was uncanny, weird.

For a long time neither boy spoke nor moved.

"Harold," whispered Bob at last.

"Yes," answered Harold in a low voice.

"Let's beat it."

"And quick too," said Harold.

They retraced their steps across the room and without anything happening to disturb the silence of the house they came to the broken window through which they had entered a few moments before.

"The blame house is haunted," said Bob in a nervous whisper.

"We'll bring a squad of soldiers up here by daylight to-morrow and find out anyway," said Harold soberly.

"Who's going to climb out first?"

"I'll go," said Harold.

He swung a leg over the sill and let himself out until he was hanging by his hands. Releasing his hold, he dropped silently to the ground below. He peered intently about him through the darkness and then signed to his brother to follow.

"It's all right," he whispered.

Bob squeezed through the narrow opening and dropped down beside his brother.

"Come on," urged Harold. "Let's get out of here."

They turned to go, but before they could take a step, there was the flash of a pistol shot almost in their faces, and three men, suddenly appearing around the corner of the house, sprang at them and bore them to the ground.

Over and over they rolled on the wet ground, the two brothers too much surprised by the sudden onslaught to do more than offer feeble resistance. Bob tried desperately to get at his revolver, but his hands were pinned under him. He was lying face downwards on the ground and struggle as he would he could not free himself. And then a heavy blow over the head; a great shower of sparks shot through his brain and he lost consciousness.

Harold fared no better. They had been taken by surprise, and had had no real opportunity of defending themselves. Moreover, it was three against two. The odds were too great.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PUZZLE

**A**FTER what might have been a century as far as he was concerned Harold recovered consciousness. He tried to move, but he could not. His hands and feet were securely bound. Moreover, there was a gag in his mouth and he was unable to call out.

He was in total darkness and for some time he could not recall what had happened to him. His brain was confused, his head ached badly, and his wrists and ankles were sore where the ropes with which he was tied chafed him. Then he heard a movement close beside him. He was in a house, that was evident, for he could hear the rain and the wind still howling outside, and he was lying on something soft and dry.

Who was it beside him? Could it be Bob? There was no way of finding out for his power of speech had been taken away from him. He struggled desperately to free himself, but it was no use. Then as he moved and thrashed about on the floor



he again heard the movement beside him. He lay still and the noise continued. It came nearer to him, and presently a body collided with his.

He tried to call his brother's name but was powerless to utter a sound. Was it Bob next to him or not? He strove to work his hands free from the ropes which bound them, but the only result he accomplished was to chafe his wrists until they were raw. The person beside him was breathing heavily from his exertions, but he spoke no word. It must surely be Bob, Harold decided.

He lay still, convinced that there was no use in struggling against something he was powerless to change. What would happen to them when daylight came again he had no idea. At any rate, he thought, Alphonse knew where they had gone that evening and if they did not return he would surely sound the alarm, and a party would be sent to their rescue. But before that time came what was going to be their fate? Their assailants might return at any moment and if they did, it hardly seemed likely that they would be left merely bound and gagged. Harold could think of all sorts of awful things that might be in store for them.

Meanwhile Bob, if indeed it was Bob, never ceased to struggle for a moment. He rolled over and over, and backwards and forwards, appar-

ently trying his best to free himself from his bonds.

He, too, was probably thinking of what might happen to them if their assailants came back, Harold thought. Where was Alphonse anyway? Hours must have elapsed since they had started out from the house of Monsieur Herlant, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that by this time the old servant should be beginning to worry about them. Then Harold remembered that they had warned Alphonse not to say anything about their expedition, and it might be that as a result he would be afraid to do otherwise, no matter how worried he might be over their non-return. Moreover, Harold was certain that the old man was only half witted anyway and perhaps it was silly to expect any help from him.

What a fix they were in, and how were they ever going to get out of it? As a matter of fact Harold began to wonder if they ever were going to get out of it.

The struggles next to him seemed to have ceased for a while and save for the storm, which seemed to be abating, all was silent. How long before dawn? Harold wondered. Alphonse must give the alarm then surely. At any rate the Herlant family would miss them at breakfast, and then they

would get the news from Alphonse, and sound the alarm.

As he was revolving these thoughts in his mind, Harold suddenly heard something which caused the cold shivers to race up and down his spine. Some one was moving about in the next room. The sound was very faint, but he felt sure he had not been mistaken. Who could it be? Were their assailants returning now to finish the job they had only partly completed?

A faint glimmer of light showed through under what must be a crack at the bottom of a door. Harold strained at his bonds until he thought he should break a blood vessel from the effort, but he had no better success this time than he had had before. And the stealthy tread of the person in the adjoining room came steadily nearer. The person next to him did not move. Surely Bob must have heard the footsteps, Harold thought. Why was he so quiet? Could it be possible that he had been exhausted by his former strenuous efforts? Perhaps he had fainted.

Then he heard a hand on the door knob. Then there was silence again. It was nerve racking. Harold wanted to yell, to scream for help, anything to relieve the awful feeling that had overcome him. If only the man would come in and

shoot him as he lay there, he thought, it would be easier than this terrible suspense. If only he would do something it would make the strain on his nerves less hard to bear.

It seemed to the tortured mind of the boy that hours passed while he lay there powerless to move or speak, and still there was no sound from the other room. Was Bob as frightened as he, he wondered. He hoped not. Harold knew himself for no coward and yet he had never been in a situation like this before, and he did not know how to meet it. To face an enemy in the open was one thing, but not to know what was coming was an entirely different proposition.

Then he heard the knob turn slowly. The sound made him cold all over and he could feel an electric shock run up his back and make the hair on the back of his head all prickly, as if it were standing up on end.

It was dark as the tomb. Then for the brief fraction of a second the intruder shone his flashlight on the room he was entering. Out of the corner of his eye Harold could see the form of the man lying next to him. Not long enough to make certain that it was Bob, but he had no reason to doubt that it was his brother.

Darkness succeeded the flash of light, and silence

reigned once more. A draught of cold air from the other room smote Harold in the face and he shivered. He also shivered with fear. His nerves felt raw, as if he should scream if they were forced to endure another thing. He decided he would make an end of the suspense.

With a great effort he raised himself on his shoulders and heels and rolled over, in the direction of the intruder. And the man, whoever he was, heard him coming, and flashed the light full in his face.

“Harold.”

It was his brother's voice.

## CHAPTER XXV

### SUSPICIONS

**H**AROLD was utterly dumbfounded to realize that the man who had been walking about in the other room, and who had frightened him so badly was none other than his brother. He seemed unable to grasp this fact for a moment. Who could the man next to him be?

“Harold,” exclaimed Bob in a low voice. “Thank heaven I have found you at last.”

He bent down and by the light of his flashlight soon removed the gag from his brother’s mouth and proceeded to loose his bonds.

“There’s somebody lying next to me,” said Harold.

“Who is it?” exclaimed Bob, starting back, for apparently he had not seen the other prisoner.

“Don’t know,” said Harold. “He’s tied up though.”

He tried to rise, but his limbs were stiff and cramped from lying so long on the floor, and from having had them tied so tightly. His mouth was sore from the gag, while his wrists and ankles felt

as if they had been confined in a vise. Bob lent him a helping hand, however, and assisted him to rise to his feet.

“We’ll take a look at this fellow,” he exclaimed and turned the flashlight on the face of the man who had been lying on the floor beside Harold.

As his features were disclosed both boys started back in surprise.

“Alphonse,” they cried with one voice.

“How did he get here?” exclaimed Harold in amazement.

He hastened to remove the gag from the old man’s mouth and to untie the ropes which were tied around his legs and body.

“Poor old fellow,” he muttered. “I wish I’d known he was the one who was lying here beside me all this time.”

Alphonse was so weak he could not stand alone and one or the other of the brothers had to support him. It was several minutes before he could speak to them.

“Go home,” he murmured feebly.

“A good scheme,” said Bob grimly. “How to get there though.”

“Aren’t we still in the château?” asked Harold.

“Yes,” said Bob, “but the question is, who else is here too?”



"Whom do you mean?"

"The people who attacked us, of course."

"Where did you come from?"

"Way down at the other end of the building, I think. I'm not just sure where I have been."

"How did you get there?" demanded Harold.

"Tell you later," said Bob. "Let's get out of here now as fast as we can. Can you walk, Alphonse?"

"Go home," Alphonse repeated feebly.

"Come on, Harold," said Bob. "We better beat it."

"Did you see any one around?"

"Not a soul. Are you ready?"

They each took one of Alphonse's arms and half carrying him, half dragging him, they started to find their way out of the château. Both boys had lost their pistols and Harold's flashlight was gone; Bob still had his, however, and by the aid of the light it furnished them they presently found a door which led to a hallway opening out onto a porch. Their progress was very slow, and frequent stops were made both on account of Alphonse's weakness and because they stopped to listen carefully and get their bearings every few yards.

They found themselves in the open air at last,

however, and so far they had neither heard nor seen anything alarming. They began to breathe somewhat easier. Moreover, the fresh air was very refreshing to both Harold and Alphonse.

The rain had ceased and the first streaks of light showed in the eastern sky. Low-hanging gray clouds scudded across the heavens, and the wind was still cold. But they were out of the château and almost anything seemed good to them in comparison.

“Gosh!” muttered Bob. “What a night!”

“I’d like to know what happened,” said Harold. “Did some one hit you over the head?”

“With a crowbar, I think, from the way it felt,” said Bob ruefully, at the same time putting his hand gingerly on a certain spot on the back of his head.

“But you weren’t tied up.”

“Wasn’t I though?” exclaimed Bob. “Just look at that.”

He held out his hands and faint as was the morning light Harold could see the great red welts on his brother’s wrists where the ropes had bound them.

“Going home?” asked Alphonse querulously.

“Yes,” said Bob. “We’re going home, Alphonse.”

"How did he get up to the château, do you suppose?" said Harold.

"Search me," said Bob. "Perhaps he got worried about us and started out to investigate, and this is the result."

"Poor old fellow," said Harold. "I was sure he would be thinking of us and I really couldn't understand why he hadn't sent some one after us when we were gone so long. If I'd only realized that he was lying there beside me all the time."

They reached the highway and after a long and very tedious walk came to the village, passed through the sentry lines and arrived back at the home of *Monsieur le Maire*. Monsieur Herlant heard them come into the house and hastened to dress himself and come out to greet them. He was greatly shocked by their appearance, and particularly by the sorry plight in which Alphonse seemed to be.

Madame Herlant got up to make hot coffee for them, and to bathe their lacerated wrists and ankles for them with a cooling lotion she had prepared. Then Bob recited the story of what had befallen them since they had started out the previous evening.

It seemed that he had received a blow on the head at about the same time as Harold and when

he recovered consciousness had found himself tied hand and foot and gagged as his brother had been. Only he had been able by dint of great effort to free his hands, and with his hands free was able to remove the gag and to untie the ropes which held his ankles. Then with the aid of his flashlight he had started out in search of Harold. How he found him has already been told.

"But Alphonse, how did he come there?" inquired the mayor.

"You'll have to get him to answer that question himself," said Bob. "We know nothing about it."

"What were you doing up at the château, Alphonse?" Monsieur Herlant inquired of the old man who was sitting in the corner, muttering to himself, and rubbing his sore wrists and ankles, which were badly swollen.

"I follow my young friends," said Alphonse. "I go after Germans. Get 'em. Get 'em." His voice trailed off into a babble of unintelligible gibberish and Monsieur Herlant tapped his forehead and shook his head significantly.

"Do you suppose it was Alphonse we heard running through the fields when we were on our way up to the château?" exclaimed Bob.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," said Harold.

"Very likely he got some crazy idea into his head that he ought to go there too, and started out after we had left."

"I'll get him to go to bed," said Madame Herlant, and after a little urging the old Alsatian agreed to retire.

"And now," exclaimed Harold, "what I'd like to find out is who those men were who attacked us."

"I guess there is no doubt that we found the place where the pigeons were kept, anyway," said Bob.

"You're right about that," Harold agreed readily.

"A squad of soldiers and another trip to the château is the next thing on the program then, isn't it?"

"It is, and right away too."

It was now light outside, reveille had sounded, and the camp was astir. The two young officers soon appeared before the commandant, made their report to him, and were at once given authority to take a squad—or a platoon if they preferred—and make a search of the château.

"About ten men will be enough, sir, I think," said Bob.

"As many as you think best," said the commandant. "At any rate I hope you get this mess cleared up this time."

"We will," said Harold confidently.

They stepped outside and the first man they saw was Joe.

"Joe," exclaimed Harold. "Are you in the mood for a little excitement?"

"Always," Joe replied truthfully.

"Come with us then. Where's Arthur?"

"Haven't seen him, sir. He got leave yesterday afternoon for twenty-four hours and I haven't set eyes on him since."

"Too bad," said Harold. "He would have enjoyed this party."

It did not require many minutes to collect nine other adventurous spirits who were glad of the chance to break what was becoming the monotony of their stay in the village. None of them knew what sort of an expedition they were starting on, but they were not particular on that point.

At rout step they started out of the village and it was not until they had passed its limits that Harold called a halt and told them where they were headed and what their mission was. The news was welcomed joyously, for an adventure was

promised which seemed likely to afford quite a diversion and some danger.

Harold recounted the whole story to the soldiers, and then the march towards the château was resumed. As they neared the entrance the figure of a man appeared and started down the road in their direction. There was something familiar about his walk, but Harold was really surprised to recognize Arthur as he drew near to them.

"Well," he exclaimed as he came up with them, "what are you doing around here, Arthur?"

Now Arthur looked very much the worse for wear. His eyes were sunken, his cheeks were pale and he had the appearance of a man who had been up all night. He seemed ill at ease and anxious to avoid Harold's searching glance.

"I was just going back to camp, sir," he said.

"Where have you been?"

"Up at the château."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Harold, eyeing him narrowly and feeling all his old suspicions returning to him. "What were you doing up at the château?"

"Making a call, sir."

"Been making it since yesterday afternoon, haven't you?"



"It was so stormy that they asked me to spend the night." Arthur was plainly uncomfortable, and he stood first on one foot and then the other.

"Attention!" ordered Harold sharply.

Arthur straightened up at once and a dull red flush spread over his face.

"Who asked you to spend the night?" asked Harold.

"The caretakers, sir, Mister and Missis Roux. I was calling on their niece."

"What's her name?"

Arthur turned a deeper red. "Madeleine La-Ferre, sir," he replied.

Harold looked long and searchingly at Arthur, unable to make up his mind whether he was telling the truth or not. If he had been at the château the night before he must have known about the fight. If he knew about the fight he must surely suspect that this party of soldiers was on its way to investigate. He must know that it sounded queer for him to be talking about spending the night at the château on account of the rain. His story sounded "fishy" to Harold, and though his heart ached at the thought that Arthur might have turned traitor, there was but one course of action open to him.

"You come along with us," he said. "We're

on our way to the château now. We want to know some more about this business."

Harold noticed that Arthur's color turned from red to white at this, and he felt all the more certain that this man he had always trusted so implicitly knew more about the matter in hand than he cared to disclose.

"That girl has probably turned his head and got him to make a fool of himself," Bob said in a low voice as they started off down the road again.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ARTHUR'S STORY

TEN minutes later they came to the château. This time they walked boldly up to the front door and Bob pounded on it vigorously with the old brass knocker which was fastened to it.

There was no response.

Bob knocked more loudly. The sound echoed through the halls but no one answered the summons.

Harold dispatched six of their little band to make a tour of the outside of the house and report back to him as to what they could discover. With Bob, the four other members of his band, and Arthur, standing uncomfortably a little distance away, he waited for the investigating party to return. He kept watching Arthur and the longer he watched him the stronger grew his suspicions.

Presently the soldiers who had gone around to the rear of the château returned, and reported that they had seen no one.

"We'll force an entrance," said Harold at once.

One of the men broke a window with the butt of

his rifle, climbed through the opening and unlocked the front door. With Harold and Bob in the lead the whole band filed in and a systematic search of the house was begun.

From cellar to dome it was thoroughly ransacked, but not a sign of a living thing could be found. Nor were there any traces of any one having been there recently. The party reassembled in the front hall to decide on the next move.

"There's no one here, that's certain," said Bob.

"Not a soul," Harold agreed.

"But there was last night."

"No doubt of that," said Harold, unconsciously putting his hand up to his head where a big lump testified to the blow he had received only the evening previous.

He turned to Arthur. "Was any one around here when you left this morning?" he inquired.

"That wasn't very long ago, you know."

"I saw no one, sir," Arthur replied.

"You slept here last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was around when you went to bed?"

"The only persons I saw were the caretakers and their niece, sir."

"What do you mean 'the only persons you saw'?"

"I saw nobody else, sir."

"But you think perhaps there was some one else around, don't you?" Harold demanded, eyeing Arthur keenly.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, speak up then, and tell us about it," he said severely.

"Well, sir," said Arthur, swallowing hard and plainly making a great effort to collect himself, "there was strange doings in this house last night."

"I know that as well as you do," said Harold grimly. "What I want to know is what share you had in them."

"Well, sir," Arthur began again, "it was this way, sir. I came up here just before supper to pay a call."

He blushed furiously at this and a titter ran around through the group of his companions.

"Quiet," ordered Harold sharply.

"I was asked to stay to supper and I did. There was just the four of us, but after supper three other fellows came in."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know, sir. They was from some artillery regiment. I hadn't never seen any of them before."

"This is getting interesting," said Harold. "I didn't know there were any artillery units stationed near here."

"Nor I, sir," said Arthur. "They seemed like decent enough fellows, though even if I do say it I wasn't very glad to see them."

"What time did they come?" Bob inquired.

"Just before dark. We sat around and talked for a while and then Miss LaFerre and I went in the next room to talk. We was in there maybe twenty minutes or so when she got up to go and speak to her aunt. Well, sir, she went out and then all of a sudden the door was slammed shut and I heard the key turn in the lock."

"Are you telling the truth?" demanded Harold sharply.

"Before heaven I am," exclaimed Arthur earnestly. "I swear it."

"Go on then," said Harold a little less severely.

"Well, sir, as I said, I heard the key turn in the lock. That struck me as pretty funny and I jumped right up and tried to open the door, but of course I couldn't. There was a door leading out the other side of the room, but I found that locked too. There was no window in the room at all; I guess it must have been built for a big store closet or something. Well, sir, I was in a pretty fix.

At first I thought some one was trying to play a joke on me, probably one of them fresh artillery guys, so I said nothing for a while.

"Pretty soon, though, when nothing happened and I didn't hear no sounds of any kind outside I began to get sore. Then I hammered on the door and I called and I shouted, but nothing doing. I was getting crazy mad by this time and so I picked up a chair and began to try to break the door down with it, but it was a tough old bird and there was nothing doing."

"Did you stay there all night?" Harold asked.

"Yes, sir," said Arthur.

"And you couldn't break the door down at all?"

"No, sir."

"How did you get out this morning then? You said there was no one around when you left here."

At this remark Arthur looked more uncomfortable than he had at any previous stage of the proceedings. He cast a pleading glance at Harold as if he would ask to be spared an answer, but he found no sympathy in the young officer's face. There was no time for sentiment.

"Miss LaFerre let me out, sir," he said.

"I thought there was no one around when you left."

"That's right, sir. Miss LaFerre let me out of



the room where I was locked in and then she disappeared. When I started back to camp I didn't see any one here at all."

"Where did she disappear to?" Harold inquired.

"I wish I knew, sir," said Arthur wistfully.

"Can't you explain what happened to you anyway?"

"No, sir, I can't. There's something mysterious about the whole business; about this house too. What became of them three artillery guys and the caretakers I don't know. But they beat it sure enough. Miss LaFerre she looked worried as could be this morning. Then she just went and disappeared. I looked all over the house, but I couldn't find nothing; that is, nothing but a bunch of ropes and a lot of feathers in one of the rooms."

"Did you ever hear that carrier pigeons were kept in this house?" asked Harold suddenly.

Arthur's eyes bulged at this remark. His face also turned deadly pale. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose that was it? Oh, I hope not."

"Why do you hope not?" asked Harold. "What do you mean?"

"Maybe that bunch last night was up to some stunt, and they was afraid I would get on to them.

Now that I think of it them artillery guys looked sort of phoney to me. But if Madeleine was mixed up in it too—”

He stopped and if appearances were to be trusted was in real distress of mind. Harold watched him closely. If he was shamming, he decided he was certainly a wonderful actor. Were his suspicions of Arthur unfounded after all? He glanced at Joe, who showed very plainly by his countenance that he did not believe his friend guilty of any wrongdoing. How was it all to be explained?

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LIGHT

“**L**ET me ask a question,” said Bob.  
Harold moved back a step to give his brother room.

“Tell me,” Bob said to Arthur in a kindly voice, “are you in love with Mademoiselle LaFerre?”

Arthur looked very uncomfortable at this question, but Bob reassured him. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” he said.

“Well, sir,” said Arthur slowly, “yes, sir, I am.”

“And you’re afraid she is mixed up in some sort of thing that isn’t exactly right. Isn’t that so?”

“Yes, sir,” Arthur replied.

“There is a suspicion, you know,” Bob continued, “that the carrier pigeons we have been seeing around here came from this house. Did you know that?”

“Not till just now, sir.”

“But the whole thing looked queer to you, didn’t it, and you haven’t wanted to talk about it because you don’t want to get the young lady in trouble.”

"That's it exactly, sir. If she has done anything wrong I don't want to be the one to have to tell on her."

"I understand," said Bob.

"I haven't done anything myself, sir," Arthur protested eagerly.

"I'm sure you haven't," said Bob. "But we're here to find out who did, and now that we understand each other you can help us a good deal, I know. I don't believe Mademoiselle LaFerre has done anything wrong and I'm anxious to prove it to everybody. Just as anxious as you are."

"If only Alphonse were here," said Harold. "He could help us a lot."

"He could if he wasn't crazy," Bob agreed.

"Well, if hating Germans was any help he would be a big one. Perhaps that's a better way to say it."

"One more look around the house," said Harold to the men. "We want to be dead sure that we haven't missed anything."

The soldiers scattered to resume their search of the château, leaving the two brothers alone in the hallway. Arthur had joined in the hunt this time, eager to find some proof that the lady he admired was innocent of any wrongdoing.

"I feel sorry for Arthur," said Bob when the

rest of their party had left them. "I'm afraid his friend, Mademoiselle LaFerre, knows more about this business than he thinks."

"But you told him you were sure she was innocent," Harold protested. "Were you just trying to cheer him up?"

"That's it exactly. As I say, I feel sorry for him."

"Well, it certainly looks as if she was in with the crowd all right. Who do you suppose the three artillerymen were?"

"Spies."

"You think so?"

"Why not? And who do you think the three men were who attacked us last night?"

"The same three, I suppose."

"Certainly they were."

"Well, it is tough on Arthur to have his girl mixed up with a bunch like that, isn't it?"

"It is indeed," Bob agreed. "There's one thing I don't understand, though, and that is how she could have disappeared this morning when Arthur was right here."

"And that is what makes me wonder if Arthur is telling the truth."

"It certainly is qu—"

He broke off in the middle of the sentence and

stared at the wall opposite him as if he had suddenly seen a ghost. He whipped his revolver out of his belt while his eyes looked as if they were about to start from his head. Harold had been standing facing his brother, but seeing the look on his face, wheeled quickly and turned around to see if he could learn the cause of his sudden alarm.

The space under the stairs leading to the second floor was paneled with dark oak. To his amazement and alarm he saw one of the panels of what had seemed solid woodwork swinging in as if on hinges. Out of the darkness of the interior of the closet came a young girl. Utter surprise deprived both young officers of their powers of speech for a moment.

Then she spoke. "Good morning," she said pleasantly, the slightest trace of an accent coloring her words.

"Good morning," stammered the two brothers together.

"You are looking for spies?" she queried.

"We are," Harold replied, while he kept his pistol ready for instant use, not knowing what was to follow.

"I can show them to you," she said, and as she stepped out into the hall the panel swung shut behind her.

This was a surprising statement and the two brothers were becoming more and more bewildered by the rapid succession of surprises they had met with that morning. Unexpected events was crowding on one another's heels.

"Tell the rest of the men to come here," Bob ordered Joe who had at that moment reappeared in the hall. "Tell them to keep a sharp lookout too."

Joe gave one surprised look at the three people standing in the hall and then hurried away to carry out his order.

"You can show them to us?" demanded Harold. "What do you mean?"

"What I say," the girl replied calmly. "At least I can show you the leader of them."

"How many are there?"

"But four real ones. There are two more who are only weak and who have listened to the voice of money."

"This is very interesting," Harold observed. "Lean against that panel there," he ordered one of the men. "See if it opens."

"You must know how," smiled the girl, and stepping up to the banisters she turned one of them and the panel opened.

"That's how you disappeared this morning, I



see," said Bob. "No wonder Arthur couldn't find you."

The rest of their band had now returned and were staring in open-mouthed amazement at this demonstration. Particularly Arthur who glanced first at Mademoiselle LaFerre and then at the panel as if he was unable to believe his eyes.

"Yes," she said with a smile.

"Why did you hide from him?"

Tears welled up in her eyes. "Because," she said, "I wanted to shield my uncle and my aunt. I was afraid if he ask me questions I have to tell him the truth, and then they suffer."

"So they are two of the six, are they?"

"They are really loyal to France," she exclaimed bitterly, "but they have always been poor and they listen to the talk of money."

"Where are they now?" Harold inquired.

"They run away. I do not know where."

"Is that true?"

"It is. I hide this morning so I do not have to tell that they have gone. I want them to get a good start. They have cared for me since I was a little girl and I cannot help it; I love them."

She was evidently sincere in what she was saying, but the two young officers were interested in catching the rest of the band who evidently were

the ringleaders and for the moment they were content to ignore the old caretaker and his wife. It would be a simple matter to catch them anyway, they figured.

"You say you can show us the people we want?" Harold asked for the second time.

"I can take you to one of them anyway."

"All right," said Harold briskly. "Let's start."

"Follow me," she directed and started towards the front door.

"We'll watch you too," exclaimed Harold grimly. "No fooling now, remember. This is business."

She made no reply to this warning, merely giving the young American a bright smile, and passed quickly out of the door. The party of soldiers followed after her, one of them, Arthur, not enjoying the experience as much as his comrades who considered the affair a great lark. He was worried and he did not know what to make of the most recent turn of events.

Mademoiselle LaFerre looked so little and pathetic; in his eyes she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Her black hair and dark eyes, with that wistful expression in them, played on Arthur's heartstrings and he felt that it was

a rank injustice to suspect her of any harm. And yet, he remembered, he had had some doubts himself and after all it might be just as well if her innocence were established once and for all.

The band of soldiers led by the pretty French girl had not reached the road when she suddenly stopped and turning to Harold pointed at a figure skulking along the other side of the hedge which marked the boundary of the estate.

“There,” she cried excitedly. “There he goes now.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CONCLUSION

**H**ER words electrified every member of the band. At last their quarry was in sight and like hounds that have been long on the scent they were all the more eager to end the chase.

But Harold looked at her, amazement and anger mingled on his countenance. Bob thought she must be fooling them.

“What are you trying to say to us?” Harold inquired testily.

“It is the truth,” she cried eagerly. “That is the man.”

“Go get him, Joe,” Bob ordered shortly.

The man who was the object of their attention turned at this moment, and seeing the squad of soldiers drawn up on the lawn of the château, seemed bewildered for a moment. He looked all about him as if searching for some avenue of escape, and then, finding none, tried to assume an air of bravado, and started to walk towards them.

"Hello," he cried. "You are having a party at the château?"

"He is the man, I tell you," whispered Made-moiselle LaFerre. "He is the ringleader of them all."

Neither Bob nor Harold made any answer to her remark. They were both staring at the man who was approaching, and to both boys the thought suggested itself that he did seem a different man from the one they had previously known. What the change was they could not have told, but it was there nevertheless.

"What are doing up here?" the man asked.

"What are you doing up here?" countered Bob.

"I go for a walk and seeing you here I think I come up and say good morning."

"That's very kind of you," said Bob. "What was that you left down there back of the hedge?"

"I leave nothing there."

Bob ignored this reply; he turned to one of the men and sent him after the bundle he had seen deposited on the other side of the hedge.

"Come on now, Alphonse," he said, turning to the man again, "tell us the truth. It'll be better for you."

Alphonse, for it was none other, suddenly changed his whole attitude. His face grew livid

with rage, and with an oath he reached for his hip pocket. But Arthur was too quick for him. He sprang at the old Alsatian and seizing both his arms held them fast to his sides. But the old man seemed suddenly to have acquired new strength, and he struggled with all his might to throw off his assailant. Other soldiers came to Arthur's assistance, however, and his arms were soon pinioned to his sides with his own belt.

His hat had fallen off in the struggle, his hair was disheveled and Harold thought it had a curious appearance. He stepped up to Alphonse and took hold of his hair. It came off. Under the wig were light-colored locks, the hair of a man of not more than thirty.

"Well, this is interesting," he exclaimed. "Mademoiselle, I offer you my apologies."

"How young you've grown, Alphonse," said Bob.

Alphonse made no reply to this taunt but if looks could kill, certainly the look bestowed on the young American at that moment would have been fatal.

"What were you doing all tied up last night at the château?" Bob inquired. "It seems to me that was a little unnecessary, wasn't it? A lot of discomfort for nothing?"

Alphonse still offered no reply. He glowered at the ring of faces which surrounded him, and in particular he seemed to wish to annihilate Mademoiselle LaFerre with his black looks.

Harold turned to her. "Perhaps you can explain it to us," he said. "If Alphonse here is the guilty man, how does it happen that he was tied up by those men last night just the same as we were? Why should they treat one of their accomplices that way?"

"They do not wish you to be suspicious," replied Mademoiselle LaFerre. "They think if you find Alphonse that way, you cannot possibly think he is one of the crowd."

"I understand," said Harold. "A good scheme and one that nearly worked too."

At that moment the soldier who had been sent to investigate the bundle behind the hedge returned. In his hand he held what looked like a pillow case with one end tied up.

"Open it up and see what you've got," said Bob.

The man obeyed. He untied the end of the sack, peered inside, and then thrusting in his hand drew forth a carrier pigeon. The bird had its legs bound together and its wings were fastened so it could not struggle and disclose the fact that there was anything alive in the sack.



"How many more?" asked Bob.

Five more were placed on the ground beside the first.

"They're very nice pets, Alphonse," he said. "Dangerous ones though. I'm surprised that a good Alsatian like you should have them in his possession. It shows bad judgment."

"You Yankee swine," hissed Alphonse. "You'll soon be sorry you came over here. We Germans will teach you some things you'll never forget."

"You have already," smiled Bob, but the sarcasm was lost on the man they had just made prisoner.

"Let's take him back to the C. O.," said Harold. "The colonel just loves to talk to Germans."

They started back towards town, and by some strange chance Arthur found himself beside Madeleine LaFerre. The two conversed in low tones all the way back, and the conversation seemed to be highly satisfactory to the young soldier. It seemed that the night previous Madeleine had been seized and bound the moment she had stepped out of the room where she and Arthur had been sitting, and one of the men in uniform had locked the door. They had heard Bob and Harold prowling around outside and were about to attack them.

Alphonse had arrived and told them of the young officers' approach and they did not want to run any risks of their plans going wrong.

Alphonse, it seemed, had feigned hatred of the Germans, and had urged the two brothers to go up to the château looking for pigeons because he had laid a trap for them there. It had been his original idea to kill them, but he had lost his nerve at the last moment, and they had been bound and gagged so that the plotters could get a good start in running away.

Madeleine had been gagged and locked in another room all night long. When morning came her uncle had released her, threatened her if she ever whispered a word of what had taken place, and had then told her that he and her aunt were going to run away. If she attempted to follow them it meant death for her, he said. She had known there were pigeons in the house, but had always been given to understand that they were being kept for the French Government.

The truth had dawned on her at last and she was horrified to discover that her uncle and aunt, instead of working for the French, were in reality plotting against them. From all that had gone before she knew that Alphonse was the ringleader, and in spite of the fact that she had hated to tell

on her relatives her love for her country had finally triumphed and she had told the true story to the young American officers as has been related.

Alphonse was soon haled before the commanding officer and put through the third degree. He confessed to everything. For two years he had been in France working for the German Government, and plotting against the Allies. Bob and Harold told all they knew of the affair, though their testimony was not needed. There was only one thing to do with a man caught as Alphonse had been, and that was to sentence him to be court-martialed. Nor was there much doubt in any one's mind what his fate would be.

"A firing squad for him, all right," said Bob as he and Harold left the commandant's quarters.

"Just what he deserves," said Harold. "Hello, what's this?"

A file of soldiers was approaching. In their midst were three men wearing artillery insignia, looking very downcast and sullen.

"Some more of last night's party," said Bob. "It looks as if the foxes had been run to earth, doesn't it?"

"Where do you suppose the caretakers are?"

"Oh, they'll turn up soon enough. Don't worry about them."

Bob was right. Not longer than a half hour had elapsed when a message came announcing that Madeleine's aunt and uncle had been found in a village five miles distant and were being brought back.

"That ends the pigeon fanciers' careers around here, I guess," said Bob. "I think I'll run up to Paris for the rest of my leave."

"A good idea," said Harold. "I wish—"

He broke off and listened to something out in the street.

"What's all that noise?" he said.

"Come and see," exclaimed Bob, and started down the stairs. At the bottom they met Madame Herlant who was weeping and crying, both at the same time. The moment she caught sight of the two young Americans she threw her arms around their necks and sobbed and laughed and babbled unintelligible words at them until they began to fear for her sanity.

"It's over; it's over," she cried again and again.

Bob and Harold had had knowledge of the great gains the Allies had been making, the enormous numbers of prisoners they had captured, and the vast amounts of material that had fallen into their hands. They had also heard some men ex-

press it as their opinion that the Germans knew they were beaten, and were about to surrender any day. But they had not been able to realize that such a thing was really possible. The war had gone on for so long that it was almost a part of their lives; it seemed queer to think of the world without the war.

"Come outside," shouted Bob. "We'll find out if it really is over."

They hurried into the street and the first man they met was Arthur. He was dancing, shouting, throwing his hat into the air, and in general acting just like a man who had suddenly been deprived of his senses. Down the street the rest of the regiment was behaving in an exactly similar manner.

"What is it, Arthur?" demanded Bob. "Is peace really here?"

"The Huns have signed the armistice," cried Arthur joyously.

"Are you sure?"

"Look," cried Arthur deliriously, pointing down the street.

The men had formed in wide lines and were dancing snake dances up and down the village street. Every one was yelling and cheering, French and Americans were hugging each other

in the ecstasy of their joy. It was a true celebration.

Monsieur Herlant came along. He rushed forward as soon as he saw the two boys and shook hands with them heartily.

"Is it not splendid?" he cried. "The war is over. The Boches admit they are beaten and have accepted Marshal Foch's terms. They have signed them this morning."

"I can't realize it," exclaimed Bob dazedly. "It does seem as if there must be some mistake somewhere."

"No mistake," exclaimed the mayor. "It is true; every word."

Joe came by, a broad grin on his face.

"You seem pleased about something, Joe," said Harold, returning his salute. "Have you heard good news?"

"The best in the world," said Joe. "So has Arthur."

"What do you mean? Has he heard something more than we have?"

"Yes, sir. He's heard that he is going to get married."

"I don't understand," said Harold, a puzzled look on his face.

"You're awfully dense," laughed Bob. "Who

do you suppose would tell him a thing like that except Mademoiselle LaFerre?"

"I see," exclaimed Harold, joining in the laugh. "Well, it's been a big day, hasn't it?"

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